



Relational Identification and Forgiveness: Facilitating Relationship Resilience

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the relationship between relational identification, forgiveness, and relationship resilience. We conducted two different studies: study 1 ($n = 177$) employed the critical incident technique to assess responses to offenses committed by a coworker; study 2 ($n = 298$) conducted a field study of working professionals to evaluate responses to offenses committed by a supervisor. Within both coworker and supervisor-subordinate relationships, those who identify with the relational other are more likely to forgive. Forgiveness facilitates relationship resilience such that the relationship becomes stronger than it was prior to the offense. We suggest that understanding the influence of relational identification and forgiveness on relationship resilience may be a key to unlocking stronger workplace relationships that become increasingly resistant to the negative effects of workplace offenses. Knowing that offenses can serve as an impetus toward stronger relationships (rather than a thrust toward impoverished relationships) is essential in dynamic work environments where offenses are inevitable. We examined how relationships that endure relational adversity well become stronger as a result of forgiveness. We replicated and extended our findings across methods and contexts, demonstrating the pervasiveness of the proposed relationships.

Keywords Identification · Forgiveness · Resilience

Introduction

Individuals are imperfect and vulnerable to committing offenses within work relationships. For example, individuals may be inconsiderate, self-serving, careless, or even malicious in their workplace conduct (Aquino, Grover, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). Such offenses can evoke contempt, anger, bitterness, and spite in those who are offended by the behavior (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986). Offenses in the workplace are referred to as workplace transgressions (Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005). Transgressions can be costly to work relationships—often resulting in hostility, ill-will, toxic

work environments, attrition, and even profit loss (see Aquino et al., 2003). The adverse effects of transgressions can be mitigated by forgiveness, thereby leading to employee well-being, satisfaction, and retention (see Aquino et al., 2003; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005). Although the harm of workplace transgressions and the benefits of forgiveness are well-documented, little is known pertaining to the potential for one's level of identification within a work relationship to shape forgiveness outcomes.

We know that those who engage in perspective-taking are more likely to forgive—and so are those who consider the transgressor a friend (see Fehr et al., 2010; Karremans & Van Lange, 2005). Similarly, those who have cooperative intentions, perceive relationship closeness, and are willing to sacrifice for the relational other are more likely to forgive (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Moreover, those who develop a sense of “we-ness” such that the relational other is included in the definition of self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) forming a “pluralistic self-and-partner collective” (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998, p. 939) tend to be more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors with the relational other (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Karremans & Van

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Lange, 2007). Karremans and Van Lange (2007) found that cognitive interdependence is also related to forgiveness. Ricketta and van Dick (2005) and van Knippenberg and van Schie (2000) note that we tend to direct our thoughts, feelings, and behavior toward individuals with whom we identify and endeavor to forge personalized relationships with those individuals (Aron et al., 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). This research suggests that identity-based mechanisms may be influential in shaping forgiveness outcomes between two individuals, but, to our knowledge, scholars have not empirically examined how one's level of relational identification with a coworker or supervisor influences forgiveness and the capacity for the members of the dyad to become resilient to adversity within the relationship.

Relationships at work are an important driver of positive work place outcomes: they are the fundamental unit of the organizing process (Grant & Hofman, 2011), often “do the most to make our life sweet or sour” (Hughes, 1950, p. 321) and can “endow us with meaning and clothe us with comprehensibility (Sampson, 1993, p. 106; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Within relationships, individuals are more likely to self-disclose, participate, and be more intensely involved and engaged (Simmel, 1969). In fact, human behaviors occur “within the context of relationships” (Dutton and Ragins, 2007, p. 4). Because relationships are so important to work outcomes, developing a more complete understanding as to how to renew such relationships is paramount, especially if flawed behaviors within relationships are inevitable.

We employ an identity lens to discover the empirical relationship between relational identification and forgiveness. Until now, the relationship between relational identification and forgiveness has not been examined. Moreover, the consequence (relationship resilience) of relational identification shaping forgiveness outcomes remains unexplored. In examining how relationship resilience develops, we look at forgiveness as a mediator of the relationship between relational identification and relationship resilience, suggesting that the positive valence one has for a particular relationship (i.e., relational identification) will lead to removing negative thoughts and feelings following the transgression (e.g., forgiveness; see Aquino et al., 2003; Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2006; Fehr et al., 2010; cf. Pratt & Dirks, 2007; Rusbult et al., 2005), resulting in the relationship becoming stronger than it was prior to the transgression (i.e., relationship resilience).

We make three major claims in this paper. First, we propose that relational identification is positively related to forgiveness. Second, we suggest that forgiveness is positively related to relationship resilience. Third, we argue that forgiveness mediates the relationship between relational identification and relationship resilience. We conduct two studies to test our hypotheses. Study 1 uses the critical incident technique (Aquino et al., 2001; Flanagan, 1954) to assess forgiveness-

related outcomes within coworker relationships. Study 2 assesses the same outcomes in a field study that surveys working professionals and assesses supervisor-subordinate relationships (instead of coworker relationships) over time. Our hypotheses are supported and our findings are consistent across studies.

Relational Identification

Work relationships provide a unique context wherein individuals are confronted with the choice to forgive or not forgive. Such relationships are shaped by task structure, power differentials, levels of authority, and adherence (or not) to indirect relational cues. For example, individuals within work relationships will find themselves in situations they may never pursue in relationships outside of an organizational setting—situations where they might have varying levels of identification with the relational other. Individuals often perform tasks and work with peers and supervisors by assignment rather than by choice. Individuals are also compelled, at times, to accept power differentials and levels of authority that may have been arbitrarily established. Assessing forgiveness vis-à-vis the basis of the work relationship is particularly useful because individuals in work relationships have more at stake than the preservation of a relationship: economic and career viability may also hang-in-the-balance if transgressions within work relationships are not resolved (Aquino et al., 2003). Likewise, because we spend so much of our time in the workplace individuals may choose (or even feel a need) to develop relationships that are rich and provide emotional connections for them (i.e., relationships with which they identify) (cf. Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Relationships based on relational identification are viewed as providing a positively enhanced definition of self via emotional support, friendship, and an enhanced self-image (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). This positively enhanced definition of self can provide increased richness that is invigorating and meaningful (Walsh, Bartunek, & Lacey, 1998).

Identification is a means by which individuals are able to define themselves as part of a group or dyad (Pratt, 1998; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Two antecedents of identification are self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Individuals can augment their self-concept by perceiving themselves, in part, as one with those they respect, revere, and wish to emulate (Aron & Aron, 2000; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2001). This oneness permits the desired extension of self: provided that the internalized identity is consistent, or becomes consistent with, the individual's values, goals, and aspirations (Miller, Allen, Casey, & Johnson, 2000). Likewise, uncertainty is reduced as information is exchanged and the individual can better understand and predict social interaction (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Relational

identification is the extent to which an individual internalizes his or her role within a relationship and commences to embody that role as part of his or her construal of self such that positive valence is ascribed to the role-based and person-based elements of the relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). As such, the focal individual perceives a degree of oneness with the relationship such that benefiting the relationship can be perceived, in part, as being concomitant with benefiting the self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Because each party comes to value the other's interest as their own, this oneness can also produce a deeper level of trust, identification-based trust, wherein each party can act as an agent of the other (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), thereby reducing uncertainty (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is when individuals remove negative thoughts and feelings toward the relational other and refrain from seeking revenge (Aquino et al., 2003). Forgiveness is a choice whereby the focal individual removes antipathy, anger, and hostility elicited by the transgression (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1991; McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Forgiveness does not necessarily come easily to everyone. Some even suggest that responding negatively to a transgression with hostility or even revenge may be a natural inclination (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992; Marongui & Newman, 1987; McCullough et al., 1998)—although individual dispositions as well as the relational and organizational context may render a positive response more or less likely (Fehr et al., 2010). Forgiveness is less likely to occur when the focal individual ruminates over the transgression such that he or she contemplates and communicates his or her negative feelings to others and receives support, comfort, and assurance—all of which may serve to escalate the negative feelings toward the transgressor and generate bias toward the relational other (Bar-Elli & Heyd, 1986; Bright, Fry, & Cooperrider, 2006). Thus, forgiveness is when individuals choose to overcome negativity—even when opportunities to ruminate and/or exact revenge appear to be justified (see Aquino et al., 2001; Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1991; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Shriver, 1995; Van Lange et al., 1997).

Forgiveness is similar to, but distinct from, reconciliation and trust repair. Although, with forgiveness, individuals may wish to “extend acts of goodwill...in the hope of restoring the relationship” (Aquino et al., 2006, p. 654; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Hargrave, 1994; Pettitt, 1987; Pollard, Anderson, Anderson, & Jennings, 1998), forgiveness does not require restoration of the relationship. Trust repair involves returning to a state where the actor is willing to be vulnerable to the relational other which requires restoring perceptions of the other's trustworthiness (Mayer,

Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000; Ren & Gray, 2009; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). When trust has been violated, perceptions of trustworthiness can be restored by actions that signal future trustworthiness, such as providing social accounts or offering recompense, etc. (Ren & Gray, 2009; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009; Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006). In contrast, forgiveness does not involve passing judgments on the other's trustworthiness but, rather, the resolution of negative emotions toward the offender (Aquino et al., 2003; Bright & Exline, 2012). Hostility and anger toward the offender fade with forgiveness, but doubts about the trustworthiness of the offender may linger (Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004). That said, forgiveness can aid in trust repair, as it removes negative emotions, enabling the actor to process new information regarding the offender without the cloud of hostility and anger (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009).

Riketta and van Dick (2005) and van Knippenberg and van Schie (2000) suggest that individuals will direct their positive actions and affections toward those with whom they identify such that relational identification will increase the likelihood of highly personalized relationships (Aron et al., 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). When individuals have high levels of relational identification, we suggest that they will be more likely to lead to forgiveness because part of their definition of self is determined by their relationship with this individual (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). As such, they forgive because they do not want to remain angry with a person with whom they identify. Otherwise, the potential forgiver might experience high levels of cognitive dissonance. Further, because relational identification is likely to lead to a deeper level of trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), individuals high in relational identification are more likely to interpret the offender's behavior more favorably going forward. Thus, relational identification and the attendant trust should lead individuals to interpret any conciliatory gesture made by the offender as indicative of true remorse and good will. Such interpretations will render it easier to forgive the offending other.

Individuals who identify with a relationship tend to be more willing to view the relationship more holistically and take a broader and more tolerant view of behavior (cf. Cooper & Thatcher, 2010). Thus, individuals who identify with the relationship will be more hesitant to seek revenge, or another form of nonforgiveness, against the relational other. Rather, such individuals will be more likely to engage in thoughtful and hopeful contemplation about removing their negative thoughts and feelings toward the transgressor—creating a desire to forgive the transgressor (see Fehr et al., 2010). Relational identification triggers positive contemplation, helps reduce negative rumination, and facilitates the reframing of the situation from a challenge to an opportunity to act (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003). In this manner, relational

identification fosters the conditions under which forgiveness occurs. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1: Relational identification is positively associated with forgiveness.

Relationship Resilience

We define relationship resilience as occasions in which, following adversity, the focal individual observes his or her relationship with the relational other as being stronger than it was prior to the adversity (see Caza & Milton, 2012; Masten & Reed, 2002; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005; Thompson & Ravlin, 2016). Although transgressions can create relationship challenges, they can also serve as a catalyst for relationship resilience wherein the focal individual observes that the relationship is stronger and growing increasingly immune to future threats (Caza & Milton, 2012). Although resilience has previously been conceptualized as a stable personality trait (Block & Block, 1980; Block & Kremen, 1996; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004), it has also been characterized as a “process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of adversity” wherein situational factors (e.g., the behavior of a relational other) play prominently in the adaptation process (Caza & Milton, 2012; Masten, 2001; Masten & Reed, 2002).

As individuals feel the capacity to be resilient, they are more likely to feel capable of realizing their cognitive potential (Spreitzer et al., 2005), perceive interactions as being non-threatening, and express their views without fear of being embarrassed by the relational other (i.e., psychologically safety) (see Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009; Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990; Spreitzer et al., 2005). Resilient relationships will be more optimistic in the face of adversity (cf. Carmeli et al., 2009; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Losada & Heaphy, 2004). In fact, resilient relationships will likely “feel different for the people in them” (Carmeli et al., 2009, p. 83) such that individuals exercise forbearance in that they are more moderate and calm in their reactions to adversity (McCullough et al., 2003, p. 542). Although conflict can create adversity within a relationship, overcoming conflict through forgiveness can help individuals feel that they are in a better position to combat future adversity and have grown closer together as a result of overcoming the conflict (cf. Caza & Milton, 2012). This speaks to the potential positive influence of forgiveness in terms of generating an ability to bounce back from setbacks such that the relationship is perceived as being stronger than it was prior to the transgression.

One reason forgiveness may promote relationship resilience is that individuals who forgive may be better able to cope with future adversity. Experiencing an offense and refusing to forgive is associated with strong negative emotions,

physiological arousal, and stress (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Research suggests that individuals who imagine feeling forgiveness and empathy experience significantly less physiological arousal (Witvliet et al., 2008). Individuals who do not forgive may experience physiological and psychological distress which will likely undermine their ability to cope with future conflicts while decreasing their sense of control. Conversely, individuals who forgive can be better equipped physically and psychologically to cope with future challenges to the relationship. Being better equipped to deal with future challenges can result in feelings of perceived control (Witvliet et al., 2008).

A second reason why forgiveness may promote relationship resilience is that it may reinforce the relationship itself. Theories of cognitive consistency (e.g., Festinger, 1957) suggest that individuals seek to maintain internal consistency among their attitudes and behavior. As a result, forgivers may endeavor to align their behavior with their cognitions through adjustments in their attitudes and beliefs—even if that means engaging in positive framing in order to justify their forgiveness. As such, forgivers will likely assess the relationship as being in a positive state in the wake of forgiveness—experiencing a sense of renewal of the relationship and an enhanced commitment to the relationship (Ysseldyk & Wohl, 2012). As the focal individual experiences reduced stress and engages in positive framing, his or her positive cognitive and emotional responses will likely signal a willingness to invest in the relationship further (Finkenauer, Wijngaards-de Meij, Reis, & Rusbult, 2010)—thereby strengthening relational bonds. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 2: Forgiveness is positively associated with relationship resilience.

The preceding discussion suggests a mediated path from relational identification via forgiveness to relationship resilience. Indeed, research suggests that identification can mitigate the experience of stressful events (Haslam, Jetten, & Waghorn, 2009; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). The relationship itself is a source of social support; thus, highly identified individuals are better able to cope with stressors on the relationship. Research suggests that individuals who are more invested in the relationship are likely to respond in positive ways, including forgiving or letting go of the offense (Finkenauer et al., 2010; Rusbult, 1987; Rusbult & Lowery, 1985). When faced with an event or situation that threatens the relationship itself (such as an offense), individuals who are more strongly invested in the relationship are apt to work to preserve and even enhance the relationship (Rusbult, 1987; Ysseldyk & Wohl, 2012). Those who identify with a relationship and view the relationship as a positive extension of self tend to feel that they strengthen themselves even as they

strengthen the relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). As such, making the relationship stronger vis-à-vis forgiveness, is, by extension, making the individual stronger. Through its relationship to forgiveness, relational identification is likely to be positively related to relationship resilience. Thus, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3: Forgiveness mediates the association between relational identification and relationship resilience.

Overview of Studies

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. For study 1, we used the critical incident technique (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Flanagan, 1954) in assessing responses from undergraduate students with regard to offenses committed by a coworker within the last 4 months. In study 1, we tested the links between relational identification, forgiveness, and relationship resilience. Study 2 represented a replication and extension in three critical ways. First, to assess the generalizability of the findings of study 1, in study 2, we surveyed full-time working professionals across three time periods. Second, to ascertain the robustness of the phenomenon, participants in study 2 evaluated an offense committed by an immediate supervisor as opposed to a coworker. Third, to support the validity of the construct of relational identification, we employed a different operationalization of relationship identification. In study 1, we employed a critical incident technique to prompt participants to think of relationships with which they had high versus low relational identification. In study 2, participants' relational identification was measured. Thus, with study 2, we tested the same hypotheses we tested in study 1 and assessed whether the same structural relationships would hold for working professionals within supervisor-subordinate relationships across three different time periods.

In developing scales for forgiveness and relationship resilience, we followed Hinkin's (1998) guidance for scale development. We specified the domain of the construct to ensure "the sample of items drawn from potential items adequately represents the construct under examination" (Ghiselli, Campbell, & Zedeck, 1981; Hinkin, 1998, p. 105). We sought feedback from multiple sources to determine the face validity of the items, ensure use of familiar language, avoid double-barreled questions, and pretest the items (Hinkin, 1998). We received feedback on these scales from several individuals, including undergraduate students and management scholars regarding wording of items, alignment with the definition and items (endeavoring to ensure our theoretical descriptions precisely matched our operationalization of the constructs) (cf. Anderson & Gerbing, 1991). We adhered to the general steps

outlined by Hinkin (1998) concerning questionnaire administration, item reduction, and confirmatory factor analysis. More specifically, we assessed the reliability and validity of the new measures using two independent pilot studies (i.e., Hinkin, 1998) and found that the measures were reliable and supported the proposed factor structure.

Study 1 Method

In study 1, we employed the critical incident technique (Aquino et al., 2001; Flanagan, 1954) to assess responses from undergraduate students with regard to offenses committed by a coworker within the last 4 months. We tested the relationship between relational identification, forgiveness, and relationship resilience.

Sample

We administered a survey to 186 students enrolled at a university in the southeast USA. Of those, 177 students followed instructions in identifying a coworker who had committed a transgression against them (as opposed to a supervisor). Our final sample was 177 students. Participation was voluntary and in exchange for extra credit. Participants were assured that their responses were anonymous. Of the 177 participants, 52% were male, 75% were Caucasian, mean age was 20 years (s.d. = 1.49), average work experience was 31 months (s.d. = 33), organizational tenure was 18 months (s.d. = 31), and relationship tenure was 29 months (s.d. = 45). The average number of months since the transgression was 1 month.

Establishing a Context

We used the critical incident technique (Aquino et al., 2001; Flanagan, 1954) to elicit salient offenses committed by a coworker within the last 4 months. Participants were randomly assigned to either the high relational identification condition or low relational identification condition. Those assigned to the high relational identification condition were asked to think of a time when they were offended by someone at work who (prior to the offense) helped shaped the type of person they were—someone with whom they identified, related, would talk with about personal things, trust with secrets, or stand up for because of the personal relationship they had with this person (see Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Conversely, those assigned to the low relational identification condition were asked to think of a time when they were offended by someone at work who (prior to the offense) they did not identify with but to whom they provided (and from whom they received) benefits—someone they provided valuable resources in order to get something in return but who did not shape the type of person they were. Similarly, someone they did not identify with or

relate with, talk to about personal things, trust with secrets, or stand up for to others. After being assigned to either the high relational identification or low relational identification condition, participants were asked to provide written responses to a series of questions pertaining to the offense. Some illustrative questions include: “What exactly did this person do to offend you?” and “Why did you decide to forgive this person?”.

In response to the question “What exactly did this person do to offend you?”, for those in the high relational identification condition, the most frequently reported offenses were lack of dependability and insufficient follow-through on commitments (43% of respondents; e.g., “teammate didn’t do his part of the project,” “this person said that they would be at the meetings, but did not show up, answer or return phone calls, or give a reason for being absent,” “they did not pull their weight and I ended up doing most of the work”) and being rude and inconsiderate (37% of respondents; e.g., “she yelled and made a scene in front of other coworkers,” “they were snappy and had attitude,” “continuously made rude comments about me to both me and other coworkers”). Deception (13%) and ignoring (7%) were also reported as the reason for the offense. Similarly, for those in the low relational identification condition, the most frequently reported offenses were lack of dependability and insufficient follow-through on commitments (41% of respondents; e.g., “they didn’t do the work they said they’d do,” “he didn’t complete his part,” and “this person did not complete his half of the project and dodged my calls”) and being rude and inconsiderate (34% of respondents; e.g., “she spoke rudely to me and acted like I was ignorant,” “yelled at me when I didn’t know how to do something,” and “she got angry and defensive toward me”), with deception (23%) playing a more prominent role and ignoring (2%) playing a less prominent role in type of offense when compared to the high relational identification condition. As such, across both conditions, being unreliable and being insulting were the most common types of offense, indicating that the types of offenses committed were similar across both conditions. To assess similarity in transgression severity, we conducted *t* test to confirm that there were no significant differences in terms of transgression severity between the two conditions: ($t(175) = 1.41$, $p > .05$, $m_{\text{High Relational Identification Condition}} = 2.98$, $s.d. = 1.00$, $m_{\text{Low Relational Identification Condition}} = 3.18$, $s.d. = .88$).

In response to the question “Why did you decide to forgive this person?”, for those in the high relational identification condition, the most frequently reported forgiveness motives were friendship and relationship closeness (37% of respondents; e.g., “because we have strong relationship,” “I missed her friendship and I wanted her back in my life,” “it would be foolish to let this ruin our friendship”) and empathy (26% of respondents; e.g., “they deserve another chance,” “we all make mistakes,” and “she just might be having a bad day”). Conversely, for those in the low relational identification condition, the most frequently reported forgiveness motives were

productivity concerns and self-interest (38% of respondents; e.g., “we weren’t getting anything done,” “I had to keep working with her,” and “we needed to finish the project by a certain date”), the futility in harboring anger for someone not important to them (23% of respondents; e.g., “It is a meaningless relationship that wasn’t worth thinking about,” “I just wanted to move on,” and “I did not care enough about the relationship to hold onto my anger”) forgiveness being a duty and the “right thing” to do (20% of respondents; e.g., “self-morals,” “it was the right thing to do,” and “my religion encourages it”). As such, even though the types of transgressions were similar in type and severity, the qualitative data confirmed substantial differences across the conditions in terms why the focal individual chose to forgive.

Manipulation Check

We checked the manipulation by measuring the participants’ level of relational identification. We adapted the scale developed by Sluss, Ployhart, Cobb, and Ashforth (2012) to reflect the coworker relationship (instead of the supervisor-subordinate relationship) and did not restrict the relational identification to a work identity (such that we excluded “at work” from the items). The response scale ranged from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Illustrative items are as follows: “My relationship with this person is important to my self-image” and “My relationship with this person is an important part of who I am.” We obtained an alpha reliability of .90. We conducted *t* test to confirm that the manipulation was successful ($t(175) = 8.87$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.34$, $r = .56$, $m_{\text{High Relational Identification Condition}} = 3.02$, $s.d. = .96$, $m_{\text{Low Relational Identification Condition}} = 1.85$, $s.d. = .80$).

Measures

We measured forgiveness by developing our own scale. The response scale ranged from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The scale includes the following items: “I have removed my anger for him/her”; “I do not harbor ill will for him/her”; “I do not hold a grudge against him/her”; “I forgive him/her”; and “I do not have negative feelings for him/her.” We obtained an alpha reliability of .84. We did not use the benevolence dimension of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations scale (TRIM-18; McCullough et al., 1998) because this scale goes beyond measuring the removal of anger: this benevolence dimension also assesses the extent the relationship has good will, has been restored to its positive state, and has resumed its previous interactions and attitudes. Our intention was to measure forgiveness as it has been defined most prominently in the literature and as we define it in this research: removal of negative thoughts and feelings (Aquino et al., 2003). We measured relationship resilience by developing our own scale. The response scale

ranged from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The scale includes the following items: “Passing through this adversity in this relationship has made our relationship stronger than it was before”; “This challenge within this relationship has strengthened our relationship”; “Our relationship would not be as strong as it is now without this adversity”; and “This relationship is better off for having overcome this offensive behavior within this relationship.” We obtained an alpha reliability of .87.

Controls We assessed whether age, race/ethnicity, gender, transgression severity, relational tenure, organizational tenure, and positive affectivity (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) were significant control variables. Positive affectivity was assessed using the Watson and colleagues 10-item PANAS where participants were asked to indicate how often (not at all to a lot) they experienced the following mood states in the past year (e.g., interested, excited, inspired) (Watson et al., 1988). Transgression severity was assessed using transgression severity themes developed by McCullough et al. (2006). Originally, these scholars had participants write about transgression severity and used coders to determine the extent to which the transgression was perceived as “painful,” “serious,” “severe,” and “harmful.” We utilized these items to develop four Likert scale items: “This transgression was painful”; “This transgression was serious”; “This transgression was severe”; and “This transgression was harmful.” The response scale ranged from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). We obtained an alpha reliability of .84. The two significant control variables were transgression severity and relational tenure. Research suggests that transgression severity influences the likelihood of forgiveness because severe transgressions are more likely to induce strong negative affect, sever relational ties, and place the recipient of the offense in a vulnerable position and threatening to impoverish the relationship (see Bright & Exline, 2012). Relational tenure was the other significant control variable. Research suggests that relational tenure may positively influence relational identification, as relational participants learn more about each other, refine relational norms, and gain benefits due to uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement (see Sluss et al., 2012). Although the correlation matrix shows a significant relationship between the controls and relationship resilience in study 1, this relationship is nonsignificant within the path analysis model where we test our hypotheses (although, either way, the support for the hypotheses is unaffected).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To ensure support for the proposed factor structure, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. We compared the

hypothesized 2-factor model (i.e., forgiveness, relationship resilience) to a 1-factor combined model. The 2-factor hypothesized model demonstrated a good overall model fit and was a significantly better fitting model than the combined model ($\chi^2 = 39.12$ [$df = 26$]; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .05, and SRMR = .03) Hu & Bentler, 1999. We, therefore, affirmed support for the proposed factor structure.

Analytical Method

We used observed variable path analysis to test our model because observed variable path analysis simultaneously tests all hypotheses. Given parameters to sample size ratio, we determined that observed variable path analysis was the most appropriate analytical method (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). We present descriptive statistics, alpha reliabilities, and correlations in Table 1.

Our hypothesized model resulted in a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 7.01$ [$df = 4$]; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .06 [H_0 : RMSEA < .01, $p = .30$]; SRMR = .04; Hu & Bentler, 1999). In support of Hypothesis 1, the path coefficient from relational identification to forgiveness was significant (.34, $p < .01$). In support of Hypothesis 2, the path coefficient from forgiveness to relationship resilience was significant (.26, $p < .01$). In support of Hypothesis 3, the indirect path coefficient from relational identification to relationship resilience (via forgiveness) was significant and positive (.14, $p < .05$) and the bootstrapping 95% confidence interval for percentile was .01 to .53 (see Fig. 1).

Study 2 Method

In study 2, instead of employing the critical incident technique where participants were assigned conditions and asked to provide written responses to a series of questions pertaining to the offense, we conducted a field study and surveyed full-time working professionals with regard to offenses committed by an immediate supervisor. Although we assessed transgression severity, we did not collect detailed responses regarding the transgression because we did not utilize the critical incident technique or intend to conduct qualitative data analysis. Participants were asked to answer a series of questions regarding their relationship with their supervisor and, consistent with study 1, to recall an offense that occurred within the last 4 months. We tested the same general relationships tested in study 1 and endeavored to broaden the generalizability of our findings from study 1 by assessing supervisor-subordinate relationships across three different time periods. We measured the predictor variable (relational identification) in time 1, the mediator (forgiveness) in time 2, and the dependent variable (relationship resilience) in time 3 (each at 3 weeks apart to align with task cycles of each function and reduce potential

Table 1 Study 1 descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|-----|-------|
| 1. Relational identification | .50 | .50 | – | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Forgiveness | 3.66 | .78 | .37** | (.84) | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Relationship resilience | 3.18 | .80 | .27* | .32** | (.87) | | | | | | | |
| 4. Transgression severity | 3.07 | .95 | –.11 | –.24** | –.19* | (.84) | | | | | | |
| 5. Relationship tenure | 28.86 | 45.45 | .25** | .11 | .17* | .08 | – | | | | | |
| 6. Age | 20.50 | 1.49 | .09 | .03 | .12 | –.03 | .12 | – | | | | |
| 7. Racioethnicity | 1.54 | 1.11 | .11 | .05 | .02 | .05 | .03 | .12 | – | | | |
| 8. Gender | 1.47 | .50 | .06 | .09 | .01 | –.07 | –.13 | –.10 | .13 | – | | |
| 9. Organizational tenure | 18.33 | 31.25 | .10 | .07 | .12 | .05 | .61** | .19** | –.10 | –.04 | – | |
| 10. Positive affectivity | 4.04 | .55 | .00 | –.02 | –.00 | –.00 | –.13 | –.05 | –.09 | –.08 | .02 | (.82) |

Note. $N = 177$. Reliability coefficients (alpha) are on the diagonal

* significant at $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

confounds within the individuals and the context; Mitchell & James, 2001).

Sample

The sample consists of 298 full-time working professionals within the automobile sales industry in the western USA. The temporally lagged survey was originally sent to 533 employees. Of these, 423 employees took the first survey. Of these, 371 employees took the second survey. Of these, 332 employees completed the third and final survey. There were 34 employees who did not respond to all of the questions under examination. Of the 298 participants, 52% were female, 82% were Caucasian, mean age was 33 years ($s.d. = 8.6$), average work experience was 145 months ($s.d. = 105$), organizational tenure was 46 months ($s.d. = 41$), and relationship tenure was 27 months ($s.d. = 32$). The average length of time since the transgression was 1 month and the time lag between each survey was 3 weeks. We assessed relational identification in time 1, forgiveness in time 2, and relationship resilience in time 3. We also conducted attrition analysis, using logistic regression, to ensure our final sample of respondents who completed the study did not differ significantly in a nonrandom way from the sample of individuals who did not complete the study (Goodman & Blum, 1996). We found no

significant differences across these samples in predicting “staying” or “leaving” the study. More specifically, for relational identification (a construct assessed in time 1), those who left the study after time 1 were not significantly different from those who stayed for time 2 ($\chi^2 = .995$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$) and those who left the study after time 2 were not significantly different from those who stayed for time 3 ($\chi^2 = .615$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). For forgiveness (a construct assessed in time 2), those who left the study after time 2 were not significantly different from those who stayed for time 3 ($\chi^2 = .826$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). We also conducted attrition analyses on gender, racioethnicity, age, and organizational tenure. All analyses indicated no significant effects in terms of who stayed or left the study. As such, for the constructs of interest where attrition was possible (time 1 or time 2), we are able to provide evidence that attrition (i.e., nonrandom sampling) bias is unlikely.

Measures

We measured forgiveness and relationship resilience as described previously in study 1. Relational identification was measured by using the adapted measure of Sluss et al. (2012), with the target being the supervisor instead of a peer. We obtained an alpha reliability of .87 for relational identification, .88 for forgiveness, and .92 for relationship resilience.

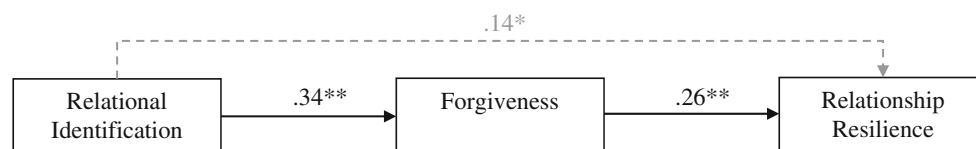


Fig. 1 Study 1 observed variable path model. Note. $N = 177$. * significant at $p < .05$. ** significant at $p < .01$. We show completely standardized path coefficients. Bootstrapping demonstrated that the indirect effect from relational identification to relationship resilience (via forgiveness) was significant (.14; .01 to .53). To simplify the graphical presentation,

we report the path coefficients between the control variables (relationship tenure and transgression severity) here: relationship tenure \rightarrow relational identification (.26, $p < .01$); and transgression severity \rightarrow relational identification (–.13, $p < .10$), and forgiveness (–.20, $p < .01$)

Controls As with study 1, we assessed whether age, race/ethnicity, gender, transgression severity (measured using the measure of McCullough et al., 2006 described previously [we obtained an alpha reliability of .90]), relational tenure, organizational tenure, and positive affectivity were significant control variables. Similar to study 1, a significant control was transgression severity. In study 2, relational tenure was not a significant control. In order to treat the two studies the same, we used relational tenure as a control in study 2 as well (noting that inclusion or exclusion of this control does not influence the hypothesized relationships in the model). We see that when assessing working professionals (as we do in study 2) that relational tenure seems to have less of an influence on relational identification such that a shared identity is not a function of time for working adults (although it seems to be a function of time for undergraduate students, as shown in study 1).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To ensure support for the proposed factor structure, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. We compared the hypothesized 3-factor model (i.e., relational identification, forgiveness, and relationship resilience) to a 2-factor model (i.e., wherein forgiveness was combined with relationship resilience) and a 1-factor combined model. The 3-factor model demonstrated a good overall model fit and was a significantly better fitting model than the other two models ($\chi^2 = 83.02$ [$df = 62$]; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .03, and SRMR = .03; Hu & Bentler, 1999). We, therefore, affirmed support for the proposed factor structure.

Analytical Method

We used observed variable path analysis to test our model because observed variable path analysis simultaneously tests all hypotheses. Given parameters to sample size ratio, we determined that observed variable path analysis was the most appropriate analytical method (MacCallum et al., 1996). We present descriptive statistics, alpha reliabilities, and correlations in Table 2.

Our hypothesized model resulted in a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 5.22$ [$df = 4$]; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .03 [H₀: RMSEA < .01, $p = .59$]; SRMR = .04; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Reaffirming our support of Hypothesis 1, the path coefficient from relational identification to forgiveness was significant (.17, $p < .01$). Reaffirming our support of Hypothesis 2, the path coefficient from forgiveness to relationship resilience was significant (.26, $p < .01$). Reaffirming our support of Hypothesis 3, the indirect path coefficient from relational identification to relationship resilience (via forgiveness) was significant and positive (.05, $p < .05$) and the bootstrapping 95% confidence interval for percentile was .02 to .24 (see Fig. 2). In all cases, the hypotheses were supported.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

In conducting two studies, we provided empirical evidence that relational identification is associated with forgiveness and that forgiveness mediates the positive relationship between relational identification and relationship resilience. The results for study 1 demonstrated these relationships when participants were randomly assigned to recall an incident with a coworker which the participant had either high or low

Table 2 Study 2 descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations

| Variable | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
| 1. Relational identification | 3.25 | .86 | (.87) | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Forgiveness | 4.05 | .63 | .19** | (.88) | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Relationship resilience | 3.62 | .81 | .18** | .28** | (.92) | | | | | | | |
| 4. Transgression severity | 2.22 | .77 | -.14* | -.18** | -.03 | (.90) | | | | | | |
| 5. Relationship tenure | 36.59 | 36.65 | .04 | -.09 | -.05 | .09 | – | | | | | |
| 6. Age | 33.19 | 8.63 | -.01 | -.04 | -.10 | -.02 | .16** | – | | | | |
| 7. Race/ethnicity | 1.41 | .96 | .02 | -.01 | .10 | -.01 | .06 | -.00 | – | | | |
| 8. Gender | 1.52 | .50 | .06 | .08 | .05 | .04 | .05 | -.01 | .04 | – | | |
| 9. Organizational tenure | 46.06 | 41.43 | .06 | -.08 | -.02 | -.04 | .67** | .21** | .10 | .01 | – | |
| 10. Positive affectivity | 3.83 | .82 | .09 | .10 | -.03 | -.11 | -.11 | -.09 | -.05 | .15** | -.08 | (.94) |

Note. $N = 298$. Reliability coefficients (alpha) are on the diagonal

* significant at $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$

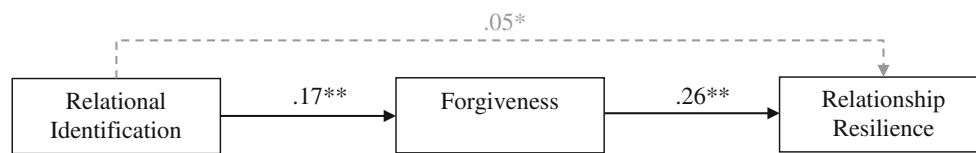


Fig. 2 Study 2 observed variable path model. Note. $N = 298$. * significant at $p < .05$. ** significant at $p < .01$. We show completely standardized path coefficients. Bootstrapping demonstrated that the indirect effect from relational identification to relationship resilience (via forgiveness) was significant (.05; .02 to .24). To simplify the graphical presentation,

relational identification. While the use of random assignment provides some rigor to the study, participants were not referencing a single, particular type of relationship in their current jobs. Instead, participants were thinking of a relationship they had with any coworker. Thus, in study 2, we asked participants to focus on a particular, current relationship, namely their relationship with their supervisor. The results for study 2 were consistent with those of study 1, indicating that our model is also relevant to subordinate-supervisor relationships. Together, the findings of these studies suggest that one's level of relational identification can have important ramifications for the likelihood of forgiveness within a particular dyad—whether coworker or supervisor-subordinate relationship. Our findings build on the extant relational identification literature and suggest that identifying with the relationship may be an important factor in whether or not forgiveness is granted and whether the relationship becomes stronger as a result. In short, one's level of relational identification may be a critical condition in the path to forgiveness and stronger relationships.

Knowledge of the outcomes of workplace forgiveness is still in the nascent stages—such that scholars are just beginning to uncover important workplace outcomes that come in the wake of workplace forgiveness (see Aquino et al., 2003; Fehr et al., 2010). In our case, we provide an important outcome: relationship resilience (in the context of both coworker relationships and supervisor-subordinate relationships). Unpacking both the antecedents to, and outcomes of, forgiveness informs our understanding pertaining to the forgiveness process while examining how forgiveness can help individuals foster positive outcomes (i.e., relationship resilience). As a result of our studies, we know that forgiveness can help individuals feel that the relationship is actually better off for having passed through the transgression (such that the relationship is observed as having emerged stronger than it was prior to the transgression). This is important because we gain a greater insight with regard to the explanatory mechanism between forgiveness and relationship resilience. Individuals who feel that their relationship with the transgressor has become stronger than it was prior to the transgression will likely feel energized and invigorated about the relationship going forward—not just about the relationship quality but also about the manner in which transgressions within the relationship are

resolved. In fact, present resilience tends to be positively related to future resilience (Caza & Milton, 2012). These are significant findings and can help scholars elaborate on the positive aspects associated with removing negative thoughts and feelings and may also begin to direct our efforts to the benefits of being forgiven—benefits that may extend to the individual, relationship, and ultimately to the organization (see Aquino et al., 2003; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Fehr et al., 2010; Freedman, Enright, & Knutson, 2005; Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Practical Implications

This study also informs our understanding relative to practical implications. We learn that individuals within organizations can arrive to forgiveness outcomes when they identify with the relationship. Organizations may wish to make selection decisions based, in part, on the extent to which individuals who will work closely together identify with each other—and may also wish to endeavor to augment relational identification through socialization efforts once employees have been placed into their jobs (both with coworkers and with immediate supervisors). Indeed, relational identification may be a critical first step toward the development of resilient relationships. Although recent evidence suggests that forgiveness can augment future commitment to romantic relationships (e.g., Ysseldyk & Wohl, 2012), we are unaware of examinations within work relationships. In our case, we examine both coworker and supervisor-subordinate relationships—and find similar results across both types of relationships. Thus, we see that, within work relationships, forgiveness can be a means by which to make relationships stronger than they were prior to the transgression. Forgiveness has often been relegated to a conflict management tactic or conflict mitigation technique that served to reduce hostility and ill-will within relationships and organizations (or to restore relationships to a pretransgression state). Examining forgiveness in terms of a predictor of relationship resilience may help individuals and managers see an opportunity in a natural occurrence within organizations—workplace transgressions. Thereby, a potential detriment to relationships and organizations (workplace transgressions) can generate more vibrant and high-quality relationships than what existed prior to the offense (at least

in the mind of the forgiver). Managers may wish to diagnose workplace transgressions and examine the extent to which such transgressions are typically resolved and whether such resolution tends to perpetuate stronger (and more resilient) workplace relationships while also assessing whether there are conditions under which resilient relationships are more likely.

Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations with this research. First, while we were able to manipulate the recall of high versus low relational identification in the first study, we could not assess actual recall of the incident (and could not assess the perceived transgressor's perceptions of the incident, as discussed subsequently). We examined numerous potential confounds, including age, race/ethnicity, gender, transgression severity, relationship tenure, organizational tenure, and positive affectivity, and found that most of these factors were not relevant and that the observed relationships were observable beyond the impact of these control variables. Nevertheless, other sources of unmeasured variance may have been present. Thus, further research involving control episodes of offense with experimentally manipulated relationships will bolster confidence in these findings. Moreover, although we assessed responses from 298 individuals in study 2, we only assessed 177 responses in study 1 (using manipulated conditions). The relatively smaller sample size in study 1 may limit the generalizability of our findings. Although a generally accepted rule of thumb with factor analysis is 5 to 10 observations for every estimated parameter (and we exceed this rule of thumb because our 16 estimated parameters would require only a sample size of 160 observations), other scholars advocate for a sample size above 200 (see MacCallum et al., 1996; MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, & Hong, 1999). It is also important to note that the transgressions experienced by the participants in this study were not very severe. Although we controlled for transgression severity, the low levels of reported transgression severity warrant further research to more fully examine how forgiveness outcomes are influenced when the transgressions are more severe across participants with harsher types of transgressions.

Second, the data we collected in study 1 are cross-sectional. As such, our findings are vulnerable to causal ambiguity. In study 1, although we manipulate the predictor variable (relational identification), we measured the mediator (forgiveness) and dependent variable (relationship resilience) concurrently. As such, although theory suggests that relational identification shapes forgiveness and subsequent resilient relationships (due to uncertainty reduction, self-enhancement, and perceived connection and in-group status with the relational other), based on our method of measurement, we cannot rule out the possibility that resilient relationships augment perceptions of relational identification. Also confounding our measurement is the fact

that we allowed participants to choose from a range of possible transgressions and transgressors. Although there is precedence for utilizing the critical incident technique when conducting research on forgiveness outcomes (see Aquino et al., 2006) because participants are allowed to identify a specific transgressor, the potential confounds remain because, in our case, it is possible that those who were assigned the relational identification condition selected a transgressor with whom they already had a resilient relationship.

In an effort to reduce the measurement bias associated with cross-sectional data, we conducted a second study where we temporally separated (across three different time periods) measures of the predictor, mediator, and dependent variables (Mitchell & James, 2001; Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2001). Although the temporally lagged design is able to “mitigate the problem of transient mood state and common stimulus cues, and perhaps reduce the effect of respondents’ strain toward consistency” (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986, p. 540), our lack of longitudinal measurement (e.g., measuring each variable at each time period) still leaves some ambiguity regarding temporal precedence because we are not able to assess a change over time. That is, we are not able to rule out the possibility that resilient relationships drive forgiveness and relational identification. As such, we recognize that offenses and their opposite, expectation fulfillment, can trigger self-reinforcing processes whereby forgiveness and relationship resilience influence relational identification, creating the potential for elements of a nonrecursive model. Nevertheless, we suggest that providing some evidence of this causal stream, while incomplete, is nonetheless an important step in understanding the power of forgiveness, identification, and resilience and offers support to the claim that relational identification is “mutually reinforcing” over time (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p. 16).

Third, we used self-report measures which can potentially be confounded by social desirability and acquiescence (Spector, 2006). Past research has demonstrated that forgiveness is not necessarily related to social desirability (Aquino et al., 2001). Furthermore, incorporating other-report measures into a survey does not remove social desirability—it simply transfers the potential source of social desirability from the focal individual to the individual providing the assessment (Spector, 2006). Moreover, using other-report measures may prove to be less reliable—especially when the phenomenon in question is often held internally (such as forgiveness) (see Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Attempting to assess the implicit attitudes of another individual via other report may actually introduce more error into the model than what would otherwise exist (Podsakoff et al., 2003). As future studies assess forgiveness outcomes that can be examined more explicitly and objectively, we recommend other-report measures be incorporated as well. For example, scholars may wish to evaluate the extent to which the relational other feels forgiven and whether or not they feel the

relationship has become stronger. Obtaining such measures would allow scholars to examine this phenomenon at the dyad level.

Fourth, although study participants received a prompt to think about a time when they were personally offended by someone at work, and, prior to answering any questions, were asked: “What exactly did this person do to offend you?”, some study participants (16 of the 177 participants in study 1) referenced their group or team as also being adversely affected as a result of the offense. Because we did not ask how teams were affected in our prompt, it is possible that participants felt their team was also adversely affected (see Bright and Exline, 2012). Even though these occasions still involved negative individual effects on the study participant (e.g., the participant’s final grade in a course, having to reschedule a team meeting, having to do more work, losing credibility in front of the supervisor of the team, etc.), we assessed the potential influence of a transgression being committed against the team by creating a variable representing team-directed versus person-directed offenses and testing it as control variable, which did not affect the results and as a moderator of hypothesized effects, which were not significant.

We also reran the analyses removing such cases from the analyses and the general pattern of results remained the same. Nevertheless, this is a potential limitation of our study because it is possible that transgression salience (individual or team) may have been different for certain individuals. On one hand, if the focal individual is not the direct target of the offense, it may be felt less intensely, and as a result, the process of forgiveness may unfold more readily in team-directed offenses than personally directed offenses. On the other hand, as an affront to the social order of the group, transgressions against the team may arouse moral emotions that may motivate a variety of corrective actions ranging from revenge to comforting the victim (Haidt, 2003), which may complicate the process of forgiveness. We believe that a worthwhile direction for future research is to investigate the impact of team-directed offenses on the forgiveness process.

Additionally, given that forgiveness is an important step in the process of reconciliation and trust repair (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009), further research is warranted on the relationship between the two. There may be circumstances when trust has been violated but the individual does not hold the other accountable for the violation. This occurs when there is ambiguity over the attribution of the event, and the trustor ultimately attributes the event to the situation (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). In such cases, the event is not encoded as an offense and forgiveness should play a lesser role in trust repair. Further, individuals may be less likely to make sinister attributions (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000) in relationships characterized by high relational identification. Thus, a worthwhile direction for further research is the extent to which relational identification affects the encoding of events, thereby leading

to fewer instances of offenses. We see some evidence of this in finding that transgression severity partially mediates the relationship between relational identification and forgiveness, as discussed previously.

Finally, another avenue for future research is to examine the dynamics of forgiveness in less functional or conflicted relationships. Disidentification, a form of relational dysfunction, might become a prohibitive barrier to positive workplace relationships. Just as relational identification refers to having a positive valence for the role-based and person-based elements of the relationship, disidentification refers to having a negative valence for the role-based and person-based elements of the relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). As such, a definition of self with a positive valence signifies “I am,” while a definition of self with a negative valence signifies “I am not” and is likely to augment conflict and hostility (see Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Disidentification creates greater resistance to forgiveness and the potential for a downward spiral. Conversely, ambivalent relational identification refers to instances of feeling conflicted where the focal individual simultaneously identifies and disidentifies with a work relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). For example, the focal individual might identify with the person-based elements of a relationship (e.g., honesty, integrity, conscientiousness) but disidentify with how the relational other enacts certain relational contexts (e.g., being conscientious in character, but micromanaging, controlling, and overreaching in his or her efforts to be conscientious). Scholars may wish to examine the effects of ambivalent relational identification on forgiveness outcomes, especially since ambivalent relational identification may be common in the workplace, can serve as a means to disrupt group think, and help unite those who have some commonalities but also experience some cognitive dissonance inducing differences in character or role enactment (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Conclusion

We made three major claims in this paper. First, we posited that relational identification is positively related to forgiveness. Second, we suggested that forgiveness is positively related to relationship resilience. Third, we argued that forgiveness mediates the relationship between relational identification and relationship resilience. We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. Study 1 used the critical incident technique (Aquino et al., 2001; Flanagan, 1954) to assess forgiveness-related outcomes within coworker relationships. Study 2 assessed the same outcomes in a field study that surveyed working professionals and assessed supervisor-subordinate relationships (instead of coworker relationships). Our hypotheses were supported and our findings were consistent across studies.

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