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Christina N. Wright, Lisa A. Turner, and Danny L. McCarty

The relations of parental warmth, self-conscious emotions, and forgiveness were investigated. University students completed self-report questionnaires online through the university-sponsored website. The questionnaires contained measures of five constructs: parental warmth, empathy, shame, self-forgiveness, and interpersonal forgiveness. From the results, the authors concluded that interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness were predicted by parental warmth, empathy, and shame. Empathy mediated the relation of parental warmth with interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Parental warmth and self-conscious emotions were important in the prediction of both interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness.

Keywords: forgiveness, shame, empathy, parental warmth

Forgiveness is an integral factor in personal relationships (Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008), psychological wellness (Sandage & Worthington, 2010; Thompson et al., 2005), and religiosity (Passmore, Rea, Fogarty, & Zelakiewicz, 2009). Because of the importance of forgiveness, scholars from many disciplines have investigated theoretical models of forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010) and individual proclivities toward forgiving (Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O’Conner, & Wade, 2001; Eaton, Struthers, & Santelli, 2006). In the current investigation, we proposed a developmental model of forgiveness in which parental warmth supports the development of self-conscious emotions (empathy and shame), which in turn predict tendencies to forgive the self and others. The model is depicted in Figure 1, and the theoretical justification is provided in the following paragraphs.

Forgiveness can be conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that includes the traditionally conceptualized interpersonal process of forgiving others, along with self-forgiveness and situational forgiveness (Thompson et al., 2005). Interpersonal forgiveness is the process by which “the forgiver...
actively attempts to move from negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward the transgressor to more positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors” (Maio et al., 2008, p. 307). After a transgression is perceived by the victim, the victim proceeds to transform his or her negative affect (e.g., anger), behaviors (e.g., avoidance, retaliation), and cognitions (e.g., contempt, dissonance) to become more prosocial in quality (McCullough & Witvliet, 2000). According to Enright (1996), self-forgiveness is “a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one’s own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself” (p. 115). Given that many transgressions include maladaptive feelings about the self, it is important to understand the process by which the offender forgives himself or herself. In the current study, we focused on forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others. Thompson et al. (2005) reported that self-forgiveness is, at best, only moderately related to interpersonal forgiveness; therefore, more investigation into the unique natures of self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness is warranted.

Parenting Styles and Parental Warmth

Forgiveness is of particular interest to developmental psychologists because antecedents of forgiveness may be developed and facilitated through familial relationships (Maio et al., 2008). Much of the current child socialization research has been dedicated to assessing the relation of Baumrind’s (1971) parenting styles to child outcomes (e.g., Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Parenting practices can be categorized along two main dimensions: responsiveness and demandingness. According to Baumrind (2005), responsiveness is the parent’s behavioral practice of warmth, support of age-appropriate...
autonomy, and nurture. In contrast, demandingness elicits compliance from the child with the use of behavioral control, regulation, and supervision. On the basis of the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, researchers have identified four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful.

As parenting research has developed, researchers have identified specific parenting practices that underlie the parenting styles. Silk, Morris, Kanaya, and Steinberg (2003) and B. K. Barber (1996) have identified parental warmth, psychological control, autonomy granting, and behavioral control as important parenting practices. In the current article, we focused on parental warmth because of its relation to empathy (Zhou et al., 2002). Parental warmth may be particularly relevant to the emotional development in children because this practice includes many emotionally validating behaviors, such as nurturance, empathy, and support (Skinner, Johnson, & Snyder, 2005).

Parental Warmth and Self-Conscious Emotions

In a discussion of self-conscious emotions, Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010) proposed that parental warmth and nurture provide a basis for the child’s development of empathy. Warm parenting practices support the child, convey that the child is valued, and model empathy (Davidov & Grusiec, 2006). These practices prepare the child to deal with failure in a constructive way, to feel empathy for others, to take responsibility, and to recognize that reparation is possible (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010). Strayer and Roberts (2004) reported that parental warmth is positively related to children’s empathy and emotional insight. Maternal support also predicts adolescent empathic responses in interpersonal relationships (Soenens, Duriez, Vansteenkiste, & Goossens, 2007).

Self-Conscious Emotions and Forgiveness

Interpersonal forgiveness is more likely to occur in individuals who are consistently empathic (e.g., Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002). Because empathy requires an individual to have cognitive and emotional comprehension of others’ experiences, it plays an important role in forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010). Interpersonal forgiveness has been positively related to empathic concern (Giammarco & Vernon, 2014) and empathic perspective-taking (Berry et al., 2001). Furthermore, an analysis of a forgiveness intervention program found that the condition in which empathy was incorporated into the protocol was significantly more effective in increasing forgiveness than the control protocol that did not include empathy (Sandage & Worthington, 2010). In addition, individual differences in empathy were related to proneness to forgive. Participants with higher levels of empathy were more likely to forgive transgressors, regardless of which intervention program they attended. Although it has been theorized (Hall & Fincham, 2005) that empathy
is also positively related to self-forgiveness, the empirical evidence indicates a weak relationship (Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010) or no relationship (Macaskill et al., 2002).

In contrast to empathy, shame is both interpersonally and intrapersonally destructive (Konstam, Chernoff, & Deveney, 2001). Shame tends to involve a negative focus on the self that suggests that there is no path to reparation (Tangney, 2002). The experience of shame is related to other maladaptive emotions such as worthlessness, self-contempt, angry rumination, and hostility (L. Barber, Maltby, & Macaskill, 2005; Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Leeson, 2009; Rüsch et al., 2007). Shame is a negative, global emotion and is negatively related to both self-forgiveness (Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010; Tangney, Dearing, Wagner, & Gramzow, 2000) and interpersonal forgiveness (Webb, Colburn, Heisler, Call, & Chickering, 2008). However, because of the self-focused nature of shame, the relation of shame to self-forgiveness appears to be stronger than its relation to interpersonal forgiveness (Webb et al., 2008).

The current study was designed to investigate predictors of self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness. Understanding the predictors of both self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness is important for counselors because difficulties with self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness may have implications for psychological wellness (Ahadi & Ariapooran, 2009; Hirsch, Webb, & Jeglic, 2012; Seybold, Hill, Neumann, & Chi, 2001). Indeed, forgiveness interventions are effective for the treatment of depression, anger, and stress (e.g., Harris et al., 2006; Reed & Enright, 2006). Understanding the distinct emotional underpinnings of forgiveness is clinically important because self-conscious emotions may be pathways to cultivating forgiveness toward self and others. For example, interventions may be focused on developing empathic concern for transgressors to increase interpersonal forgiveness (Hill, 2010; Worthington, 1998). Taken together, exploring the relationships among forgiveness, self-conscious emotions, and perceived parenting may yield further insights into clinical practice.

Specifically, we hypothesized that parental warmth would be positively related to interpersonal forgiveness through the mediating variable of empathy. Similarly, we hypothesized that parental warmth would be positively related to self-forgiveness through the mediating variable of empathy. In addition, we hypothesized that parental warmth would be negatively related to shame and that shame would be a negative predictor of self-forgiveness. Figure 1 shows the predicted set of relationships.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited from introductory psychology classes at a regional university in the southeastern United States. These students (N = 194) participated in an online subject pool as an option for course credit.
Because students were asked to reflect on how they were parented in high school, it seemed appropriate to restrict the sample to young adults under 30 years of age (which yielded 176 participants). Although the memories and perceptions of older students are important, the memories are likely influenced by the myriad of experiences that have occurred since high school. In an effort to clean the data before data analysis, we examined the time spent responding to the questionnaires. The average duration was 35.16 minutes, with a standard deviation of 15.6 minutes. We did not include participants who were 1.5 standard deviations below 35.16 minutes in the final analysis. Thus, participants who completed the survey in less than 11.8 minutes were excluded from the study. This decision resulted in omitting three cases. We omitted these participants because it seemed very unlikely that they could have thoroughly read and responded to all items in that time span. One additional case was dropped because the participant had a very strong tendency to give the same response to the questions (i.e., straightlining; the participant gave the same response to 97% of the 68 self-conscious emotions items). We also ran the reported analyses with these four cases in the sample, and the results remained unchanged. For the final sample of 172, age of participants ranged from 17 to 28 years ($M = 19.3$, $SD = 2.0$). The sample was primarily female (73%). Responses to the race/ethnicity item indicated that the sample was 69% ($n = 118$) European American, 20% ($n = 34$) African American, 3% ($n = 5$) Asian American, 2% ($n = 4$) Latino/Latina, 1% ($n = 2$) Native American, and 5% ($n = 8$) other; one participant (1%) did not report his or her race/ethnicity. (Percentages do not total 100 because of rounding.) Participants reported their living arrangements while growing up: 65% ($n = 112$) of the participants lived with both parents, 16% ($n = 28$) lived with their mothers, 12% ($n = 20$) lived with their mothers and stepfathers, 1% ($n = 2$) lived with their fathers, 1% ($n = 2$) lived with their fathers and stepmothers, 2% ($n = 3$) lived with their extended families, 2% ($n = 3$) lived with others, and 1% ($n = 2$) did not respond.

Measures

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005) contains three 6-item subscales that measure self-forgiveness (e.g., “With time, I am understanding of myself for mistakes I have made”), interpersonal forgiveness (e.g., “Although others have hurt me in the past, I have eventually been able to see them as good people”), and forgiveness of situation (e.g., “Eventually I let go of negative thoughts about bad circumstances that are beyond anyone’s control”). Participants indicated the level at which they endorsed each item on a scale ranging from 1 (always false of me) to 7 (always true of me). The current study focused on self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness, which yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .77 for self-forgiveness and .72 for interpersonal forgiveness. In a previous study, Ross, Kendall, Matters, Wrobel, and Rye (2004) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .76 for self-forgiveness and .80 for interpersonal forgiveness.
The Test of Self-Conscious Affect–3 (TOSCA-3; Tangney et al., 2000) is a 16-scenario measure of self-conscious emotions, although the current study focused only on 11 negative scenarios. The assessment presented a list of situations, and the participant rated a number of possible emotional reactions for each scenario. An example of a scenario is “You make a big mistake on an important project at work. People were depending on you, and your boss criticizes you.” After reading the situation, participants then rated responses that measure shame proneness, externalization, detachment/unconcern, alpha pride (i.e., pride in the self), and beta pride (i.e., pride in a behavior or accomplishment; O’Conner, Berry, Weiss, Bush, & Sampson, 1997). The current study focused on shame, which yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .83. In previous research, Dearing, Stuewig, and Tangney (2005) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .73 for shame.

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) is a 28-item scale that assesses dispositional empathy. The scale contains four 7-item subscales: Perspective Taking, Empathic Concern, Personal Distress, and Fantasy. All items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me well) to 5 (describes me well). The current study focused on empathic concern, which assesses individuals’ compassion for the misfortune of others (e.g., “When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them”). The internal consistency coefficient for empathic concern was moderate at .79. Similarly, Mivelle, Carlozzi, Gushue, Schara, and Ueda (2006) reported a Cronbach’s alpha of .80 for empathic concern.

We assessed parental warmth with the 10-item Parental Support scale (described in Hunter, Barber, & Stolz, 2015; this scale was adapted from Schaefer’s, 1965, Parental Acceptance scale of the Child Report of Parent Behavior Inventory). Items address the extent to which the person perceives his or her parents as loving, responsive, and involved (e.g., “My parents gave me a lot of care and attention”). The scale was adapted for the current study by rephrasing the items as past tense and by focusing on parents (rather than mothers and fathers separately). Responses were reported on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). This scale yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .93 in the current study. Hunter et al. (2015) reported internal consistencies of .90 for ratings of mothers and .92 for ratings of fathers.

Procedure

This study received university institutional review board approval. Participants read a description of the study and then indicated consent to participate by clicking the appropriate box. No identifying information was obtained. Students under the age of 19 years also provided parental consent by faxing, e-mailing, or delivering a signed parental consent form to the psychology department office. Students completed a large battery of questionnaires; in the current study, we examined five
constructs: self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness (as measured by the Heartland Forgiveness Scale), empathy (as measured by the Interpersonal Reactivity Index), shame (as measured by the TOSCA-3), and parental warmth (as measured by the Parental Support scale).

Participants also provided demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, and living arrangement when growing up. Students were instructed (by the written instructions on the questionnaires) to reflect back to their senior year in high school and respond to the parenting questionnaire based on their experiences with the parent(s) they lived with during that time. All the other questions addressed their current state.

Results

We examined five variables: parental warmth, empathy, shame, self-forgiveness, and interpersonal forgiveness. For each variable, we calculated means from the questionnaire items that reflected each construct. Table 1 presents means and standard deviations of the variables. To determine the relations among the variables, we conducted correlations. As shown in Table 1, parental warmth was positively related to interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Empathy was positively related to parental warmth, interpersonal forgiveness, and self-forgiveness. Shame was negatively related to self-forgiveness.

Next, to better understand the relations among the variables, we conducted hierarchical regressions separately for self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness. These regressions were conducted to test the hypotheses that parental warmth, empathy, and shame would account for significant variance in self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness. Finally, we tested the significance of indirect effects using bootstrapping procedures (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

We used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the relations of parental warmth, empathy, and shame to interpersonal forgiveness.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. Interpersonal forgiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Self-forgiveness</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Empathy</td>
<td>.40***</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Shame</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.37***</td>
<td>.22**</td>
<td></td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Parental warmth</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*M = 4.88  SD = 1.12

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
Before we report the results, it is important to note that the assumption of independent variances was met: The Durbin–Watson value was 1.6, the assumption of nonzero variances was met, and multicollinearity was not evident (gender variance inflation factor [VIF] = 1.20, parental warmth VIF = 1.08, shame VIF = 1.13, and empathy VIF = 1.26). Gender and parental warmth were first entered as predictors of interpersonal forgiveness. The model was significant, $F(2, 159) = 3.17, p = .04$, and accounted for 4% of the variance. Parental warmth was the only significant predictor ($b = .29, p = .03$). Next, empathy and shame were entered as predictors of interpersonal forgiveness. The model was significant, $F(4, 157) = 9.70, p < .001$, with a significant increase in $R^2 (p < .001)$, and accounted for 20% of the variance. Empathy ($b = .71, p < .001$) and shame ($b = -.29, p = .02$) were significant predictors of interpersonal forgiveness; parental warmth was no longer a significant predictor ($b = .10, p = .43$). We conducted mediation analyses using the bootstrapping resampling method (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to examine whether empathy and shame yielded a significant indirect effect on interpersonal forgiveness. Bootstrapping mediation analysis is a nonparametric resampling method that determines the statistical significance of indirect effects within mediation models by calculating confidence intervals (CIs). Preacher and Hayes (2008) suggested that bootstrapping is preferred over other methods of calculating indirect effects because bootstrapping does not assume that samples are normally distributed. Estimates of path coefficients were based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. Analyses were conducted controlling for gender. The total indirect effect was significant, with a point estimate of .19 and a 95% CI [0.08, 0.34]. In contrast, the predicted negative relationship between parental warmth and shame was nonsignificant, whereas shame did not, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.10].

As Figure 2 illustrates, the direct path from parental warmth to empathy was significant, but the relationship between parental warmth and shame did not reach significance. The direct paths between empathy and interpersonal forgiveness and between shame and interpersonal forgiveness were both significant. With empathy and shame included in the model, the relationship between parental warmth and interpersonal forgiveness became nonsignificant. The full model explained 20% of the variance in interpersonal forgiveness. Figure 2 shows the model with the unstandardized path weights.

Similarly, we used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the relations of parental warmth, empathy, and shame to self-forgiveness. Before we report the results, it is important to note that the assumption of independent variances was met: The Durbin–Watson value was 1.9, the assumption of nonzero variances was met, and multicollinearity was not evident (gender VIF = 1.20, parental warmth VIF = 1.08, shame VIF = 1.13, and empathy VIF = 1.26). Gender and parental warmth were first entered as predictors of self-forgiveness. The model was significant, $F(2, 159) = 3.32, p = .04$, and accounted for 4% of the variance. Parental warmth was
Mediation Model for Interpersonal Forgiveness

Note. \( N = 166 \). For paths \( a_1 \) = effect of parental warmth on empathy; \( a_2 \) = effect of parental warmth on shame; \( b_1 \) = effect of empathy on interpersonal forgiveness; \( b_2 \) = effect of shame on interpersonal forgiveness; \( c \) = effect of parental warmth on interpersonal forgiveness without empathy and shame in the model; \( c' \) = effect of parental warmth on interpersonal forgiveness when empathy and shame are included in the model.

* \( p < .05 \). ** \( p < .01 \).

the only significant predictor (\( b = .32, p = .01 \)). Next, empathy and shame were entered as predictors of self-forgiveness. The model was significant, \( F(4, 157) = 9.70, p < .001 \), with a significant increase in \( R^2 (p < .001) \), and accounted for 21% of the variance. Empathy (\( b = .31, p = .02 \)) and shame (\( b = -.64, p < .001 \)) were significant predictors. Parental warmth was no longer a significant predictor (\( b = .20, p = .09 \)). We conducted mediation analyses using the bootstrapping method to examine whether empathy and shame yielded a significant indirect effect on self-forgiveness. Analyses were conducted controlling for gender. Estimates of path coefficients were based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. The total indirect effect was significant, with a point estimate of .12 and a 95% CI [0.01, 0.26]. Empathy significantly mediated the direct effect, 95% CI [0.01, 0.18], whereas shame did not, 95% CI [–0.05, 0.16].

As Figure 3 illustrates, for self-forgiveness, the direct path from parental warmth to empathy was significant, but the relationship between parental warmth and shame was not significant. The direct paths between empathy and self-forgiveness and between shame and self-forgiveness were both significant. When empathy and shame were included in the model, the total direct effect of parental warmth on self-forgiveness was reduced and was not
significant. The full model explained 20% of the variance in self-forgiveness. Figure 3 shows the model with the unstandardized path weights.

**Discussion**

In the current study, we examined the relationships among parental warmth, empathy, shame, and forgiveness. Both self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness were predicted by parental warmth, empathy, and shame. The relation of parental warmth to interpersonal and self-forgiveness was mediated by empathy. Parental warmth did not predict shame, but shame was strongly negatively related to self-forgiveness. The current findings are corroborated by past research in many ways. Previous studies have documented the relationships between (a) parenting and empathic concern (Strayer & Roberts, 2004; Zhou et al., 2002), (b) empathy and forgiveness (Konstam et al., 2001; Macaskill et al., 2002), (c) shame and self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005), and (d) parenting and forgiveness (Maio et al., 2008).

The hypothesized model for interpersonal forgiveness was supported by the results of the study in that the relationship between parental warmth and interpersonal forgiveness was significantly mediated by empathy. This finding provides further support for Maio et al.’s (2008) and Strayer and Roberts’s (2004) studies, which indicated relationships between empathy and interpersonal forgiveness and between parental warmth and empathy.
respectively. Empathy is an important predictor of forgiveness because it may allow individuals to foster an emotional understanding of the transgressors (Konstam et al., 2001). In addition, individuals who are prone to interpersonal forgiveness are more likely to report having parents who were empathic and enacted warm parenting practices (Strayer & Roberts, 2004; Zhou et al., 2002). These warm parenting practices likely model empathy for the child. Therefore, children who observe empathy in their parents have opportunities to learn to be empathic with others.

For self-forgiveness, parental warmth was related to higher levels of empathy and empathy was related to higher rates of self-forgiveness. In contrast, the relationship between parental warmth and shame was nonsignificant, whereas shame remained a strong significant predictor of self-forgiveness. The relation of shame to lower rates of self-forgiveness supports Tangney et al.’s (2000) finding of the negative relationship between shame and self-forgiveness. Although the current findings did not indicate a relationship between parenting and shame, we suspect this is because we measured only the warmth dimension of parenting. A broader measure of parenting behavior that includes more negative practices would likely reveal relations to shame. Parents’ use of controlling and critical behaviors could lead to the development of shame in children (Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010). Once in place, high levels of shame would undermine self-forgiveness.

The general model proposed in this study indicates that parenting may affect interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness through self-conscious emotions. Warm parenting supports empathy, which, in turn, supports interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Although not addressed in our study, overly critical and controlling parenting is likely to result in shame, which results in lower levels of self-forgiveness. In the general model proposed in the current study, the relations among interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness were not addressed. Learning to forgive others may positively affect the ability to forgive oneself, and self-forgiveness may positively affect forgiving others. Future research is clearly needed to better understand the ways in which interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness may affect each other.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations that could be corrected in future research. First, the study was cross-sectional in nature. Given that we hypothesized how forgiveness develops across time, a longitudinal study would be fitting. In this way, participants would not be asked to retrospectively report their perceptions of parenting in young adulthood. Rather, the assessments would occur in real time. Furthermore, forgiveness progresses temporally (Hall & Fincham, 2008) and develops with age (McCullough & Witvliet, 2000). Measuring such a construct in a cross-sectional analysis may not capture the complete nature of forgiveness.
A second modification would be to assess parents as well as children. Much like the assessment conducted by Mullet, Riviere, and Sastre (2006), investigators could measure consistency between parent and offspring reports. Parent–child reports may be comparatively discrepant, but ultimately when only one measure can be gathered, the children’s perceptions regarding parenting quality are likely to be most important (Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994). In addition, because forgiveness is a relatively nascent body of research, self-report quantitative measures alone may not be the optimal method of measurement. As Thompson et al. (2005) demonstrated, supplemental measures such as narrative questionnaires and interviews may be fruitful in continuing the study of forgiveness.

Although forgiveness is a pervasive construct, external validity for the current study is limited because participants were largely European American, female, and young adult. In addition, all participants were university undergraduates, which suggests that a broad range of socioeconomic statuses may not have been equally represented. Inferences as to whether the mediation models would apply similarly across economic statuses and individuals with varying cultural experiences are reserved for future studies.

Despite the limitations, the results of the current study add to the state of knowledge of multidimensional forgiveness. Self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness are rarely examined in the same study. In doing so, the current analysis elucidates forgiveness of self and others as distinct yet correlated constructs. Our findings indicate that parental warmth, empathy, and shame are important predictors of self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness.

**Implications for Therapy**

Forgiveness is related to many mental health concerns that are relevant for college students. For example, forgiveness positively predicts healthy coping (Seybold et al., 2001) and subjective well-being (Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008) and negatively predicts depression (Webb et al., 2008) and suicidal behavior (Hirsch et al., 2012). In light of these relationships, forgiveness-focused interventions may help promote psychological wellness among college populations.

The current study indicated the importance of self-conscious emotions in forgiveness, which may be relevant to forgiveness counseling interventions. In previous research, shame proneness has been related to psychological symptom presentations such as depression (Matos & Pinto-Gouveia, 2014; Mills et al., 2015) and borderline personality disorder (Scheel et al., 2013). For shame-prone clients, forgiveness interventions may include strategies for reducing shame, such as discussing negative self-referential ruminations in a supportive therapeutic relationship. On the other hand, individuals with higher scores on measures of empathic concern are generally more forgiving of others (Macaskill et al., 2002). Counselors may increase empathic concern by enacting strategies aimed at taking the perspective of the offender and
building compassion for transgressors. Finally, the current results also document the long-standing relation of perceived parenting to self-conscious emotions and forgiveness. Knowledge of these relationships may further enhance the outcomes of psychotherapeutic interventions such that patients may be made aware of potential developmental origins of shame proneness, empathic concern, and forgiveness.

References


