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Sex, Group Composition, and the Efficacy of Group Interventions to Promote Forgiveness

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In an extension of a prior investigation of the efficacy of group treatments to promote forgiveness, the present study examined whether participant sex and group composition predicted forgiveness-related outcomes. Multilevel hierarchical regression analyses were used to analyze data from 144 participants who completed a 2-week, 6-hour group intervention. Women reported significantly more decreases in the desire for revenge when compared to men. Group composition also was related to outcome, such that the more men who were in a group, the more likely women were to diminish desires for revenge and the less likely men were to cultivate empathy for their offenders. Implications and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: forgiveness intervention, sex differences, group composition

Over the last decade, group treatments have been implemented to help people cope with past hurts and offenses through the explicit promotion of forgiveness (see Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005). These interventions appear to be effective for promoting forgiveness in addition to a range of other outcomes (e.g., reducing depression, see below). However, invoking the term "forgiveness" in a psychological treatment is not without its perils. Forgiveness can be, and often is, misconstrued as something that might further damage clients by leading them to ignore or deny justified anger, opening them to repeated hurts, and condoning oppression that keeps them locked in cycles of emotional and physical abuse (Lamb, 2002). As a result, researchers and interventionists have spent considerable effort to define what they mean by forgiveness and to carefully delineate therapeutic goals associated with it.

Definition of Forgiveness

Although academic opinions vary, consensus is starting to emerge among psychologists about a definition of interpersonal forgiveness (Wade & Worthington, 2005). Many now agree that the process of forgiving another person is (a) internal to the person who was hurt or offended and not reliant upon the collaboration of the offender, (b) beyond the mere reduction of anger, bitterness, and revenge (i.e., unforgiveness), and (c) distinct from and able to exist independently of pardoning, excusing, or overlooking an offense. First, by explaining forgiveness as a primarily intrapersonal process, psychologists have highlighted the fact that forgiveness can occur without reconciliation (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Worthington & Drinkard, 2000). In other words, a person might be able to forgive an offender and still decide not to restore the relationship with that person (e.g., for reasons of emotional or even physical safety). Second, forgiveness is understood as something beyond the reduction of unforgiveness (i.e., the anger, bitterness, and desires for revenge that develop from ruminating about an injury). Many define forgiveness as the reduction in unforgiveness that is also accompanied by an increase in some form of positive or prosocial feelings for the offender such as compassion, empathy, or even simply pity (e.g., Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; Worthington & Wade, 1999). Lastly, forgiveness is not pardoning, excusing, or overlooking an offense. In fact, most of the group treatments designed to promote forgiveness start with an exploration of the hurt itself, encouraging cli-

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ents to identify and express all the painful feelings associated with the event (including anger, vengefulness, pain, and disappointment; for a review see Wade & Worthington, 2005).

Interventions to Promote Forgiveness

Based on this understanding of forgiveness, several treatment programs have been created, implemented, and studied. The large majority of these have been conducted in a group counseling format, addressing a wide range of offenses and client characteristics. Meta-analyses have indicated that across different group treatments, theoretically derived interventions are effective for reducing anger, bitterness, depression, and anxiety, and for increasing forgiveness, hope, and self-esteem (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005). However, few studies in this area have explored aspects of these treatments beyond the most basic outcome question (i.e., "Does a particular treatment work?"). Most studies have ignored client characteristics that might predict response to treatment even though an understanding of what works, when, and for whom is central to the appropriate and effective application of these interventions. Notable among these omissions in past studies are the differential effects of these treatments for men and women.

Although no published studies of forgiveness interventions (of which we are aware) have reported analyses by sex, there is considerable reason to suspect that differences might in fact exist. In a literature review of close to 100 nonintervention studies on forgiveness, some notable sex differences emerged (Worthington & Lerner, 2006). Specifically, men appeared to be less willing than women to (a) consider forgiveness as a way to respond to a hurt and (b) forgive a specific hurtful event. Other research has suggested that men tend to report more anger and desires for revenge against an offender (Gault & Sabini, 2000). This may be a result of gender role socialization, through which men are typically encouraged to suppress most emotions, except for aggressive ones, and women are expected to respond to offenses with understanding, compassion, and empathy (Gault & Sabini, 2000; Kopper & Epperson, 1996). This type of socialization might predispose men to respond to hurtful situations with anger, aggression, and bitterness (i.e., unforgiveness), whereas women may generally find it easier to experience the prosocial responses of understanding and compassion that are inherent in forgiveness. If this were true, sex differences would be greater among men and women who adhere more closely to traditional gender roles.

Findings from a study of the relationship between adherences to masculine gender roles and the tendency to forgive in a sample of 84 men recruited from Christian churches supported this hypothesis (Walker & Doverspike, 2001). In that study, the tendency to forgive others was moderately and negatively related to all subscales of a measure of traditionally masculine attitudes and behaviors, including avoiding femininity, seeking status and respect, concealing emotions, and pursuing violence and adventure. In other words, the more the men adhered to the traditional masculine role, the less likely they were to forgive others.

Moreover, some research suggests that sex may be related to treatment outcomes in general group counseling. Evidence from a recent study on group therapy for grief indicates that the efficacy of group treatments might vary by the sex of the client (Ogrodniczuk, Piper, & Joyce, 2004). In a study of 47 clients, Ogrodniczuk et al. (2004) found that women generally responded more favorably to short-term group therapy than did men. Specifically, women were more likely than men to report clinically and reliably significant reductions in depression, anxiety, and general symptom distress following the group treatment. However, the authors neglected to analyze or discuss the potential effect on men of being in the minority in groups that were composed on average of five women and only two men. Minority membership has the potential to be an influential dynamic in any treatment group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). Being a minority member can have a distinct, and often negative, impact on that member if not addressed in the group. It is possible that the men did not respond as favorably in Ogrodniczuk et al.'s study because they were in the minority, not because of some characteristic unique to men.

The potential effect of gender composition on the process and performance of small groups is supported by some empirical evidence. For example, research has been conducted on the effect of group composition on women and men's perceptions of and behaviors in task (as opposed

to treatment) groups. In situations where participants were in the minority sex, they showed limited leadership behaviors (Karakowsky & Siegel, 1999). Furthermore, this minority sex effect was exacerbated by the gender-stereotyped nature of a group's task (male- vs. female-oriented tasks). When the orientation of the task matched the individual's sex, the individual perceived better group performance (Karakowsky, McBey, & Chuang, 2004) and was more likely to exhibit leadership behaviors (Karakowsky & Siegel, 1999). How these findings might apply to groups focused on forgiveness is uncertain. However, to the degree that men view forgiveness-focused groups as a female-oriented topic and are in the minority, they may be less active and benefit less from the groups.

Although these findings suggest that the group composition by sex can make a difference, they are based on task groups focused on solving business-related scenarios. Very little research has been conducted on the effects of group composition in counseling groups. We found no published studies that directly assessed differences between mixed- and same-sex counseling groups. In fact, we could only find one article that directly compared client outcomes between those who were in homogenous versus heterogeneous groups (Lieberman, Wizlenberg, & Golant, 2005). In this study, patients with Parkinson's disease ($N = 66$) were randomly assigned to online support groups that were either homogeneous or heterogeneous based on onset and severity of illness. Those in the homogeneous groups reported less depression and Parkinson's symptoms following the treatment, indicating that being in a group with similar others may be more beneficial. However, homogeneity was not based on sex and the groups were online support groups for dealing with physical illness, not face-to-face counseling groups attempting to address psychological and interpersonal problems. These findings may not readily translate to typical treatment groups.

The research on group composition as a factor in counseling groups is extremely limited. Findings from related research suggest that sex alone may not fully account for differences in group behavior and outcome; group composition may be important as well. In addition, there are theoretical reasons to suspect sex differences in response to explicit forgiveness treatments, as enumerated above. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the factors that might be related to the outcome of a specific group treatment intended to promote forgiveness. Although our conceptualization and measurement of forgiveness was primarily intrapersonal, we suspected that interpersonal dynamics (such as the make-up of the groups) might be related to outcomes. Specifically, we examined whether sex, the number of men in a group, and/or their interaction predicted forgiveness-related outcomes (i.e., desires for revenge against and avoidance of the offender, as well as emotional empathy) following group treatment. We hypothesized that sex would predict outcome (women would report better outcomes than men) and that the interaction between sex and the number of men in the group would also predict outcome (fewer men in the group would be related to poorer outcomes for men, but have no relationship for women). We tested these hypotheses by reanalyzing data from a large, previously published outcome study of forgiveness treatments (Wade, Worthington, & Haake, in press).

Method

Participants

Group members. Undergraduate college students ($N = 187$) received course credit for their psychology classes by volunteering to participate in this intervention study. Participants were predominantly female ($n = 147$, with $n = 38$ males and $n = 2$ missing) with a mean age of 20 ($SD = 4.9$). Participants represented a range of ethnicities, including Caucasian ($n = 80$), African American ($n = 64$), Asian American ($n = 19$), Hispanic ($n = 8$), and other ethnicities ($n = 10$). Six people did not report their ethnicity. Of the 187 who expressed interest in the intervention, 160 (86%) initially completed preintervention questionnaires. Of those who initially completed preintervention questionnaires, 144 (90%) completed the treatment and the postintervention questionnaire.

Participants reported a range of offenses that they had experienced, the majority being betrayals (e.g., affairs), either by romantic partners ($n = 37$), friends ($n = 29$), or family ($n = 18$). Other offenses included physical or emotional abuse ($n = 21$), relationship disassociations

($n = 23$), criticism ($n = 14$), and being taken for granted ($n = 14$); four participants did not specify the offense.

Group facilitators. Three group facilitators were trained by Nathaniel G. Wade to conduct the interventions from manuals. Two male facilitators were doctoral candidates in counseling psychology and one female facilitator was a PhD-level assistant professor in counseling psychology. None of the facilitators were involved in the design, analysis, or write-up of this study. More detail regarding the facilitators and their training can be found elsewhere (Wade, Worthington, & Haake, in press).

Predictor Variables

In the prior report of this study, the primary independent variable under investigation was group condition. All participants were randomly assigned to one of three between-subjects treatment conditions and participated in one of 20 separate groups. The three group conditions (a full forgiveness intervention, eight groups; a partial forgiveness intervention, eight groups; and an active, nonforgiveness control—stress reduction through relaxation, four groups; see Procedures below) all produced equivalent changes in forgiveness-related outcomes (Wade, Worthington, & Haake, in press). Therefore, in the present analyses, we have collapsed the conditions and instead have focused on the following predictors for participants across group condition.[1]

Preintervention measure. We controlled for initial levels of forgiveness-related outcomes (revenge, avoidance, and empathy, see *Outcome Variables* below) by including the participants' scores on the preintervention measure in the first step of each regression.

Sex. The primary predictor variable in this examination was participant sex. Sex was dummy-coded for statistical analyses (male = 0, female = 1) and served as an individual-level predictor.

Number of men in each group. Because men were the minority sex in every group, we included the number of men in each group as a predictor. This allowed us to separate contributions of sex from contributions of the number of men in the group. The number of men in each of the 20 groups varied from zero to four (0% to 44%, $M = 1.9$, mode = 2). This variable was then centered over zero (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), because we were using it in an interaction term. This was a group-level variable because the number of men was dependent on the particular group from which the data were drawn.

Interaction. Lastly, we sought to examine whether the participants' sex interacted with the number of men in the group to predict differences in the primary outcome variables. Because sex and the number of men in a group were different level variables (individual and group, respectively) the interaction is a cross-level interaction.

Outcome Variables

The main outcome under examination was the participants' degree of forgiveness for specific offenders in their lives. We defined forgiveness as a process by which (a) desires of revenge and avoidance (i.e., unforgiveness) are reduced *and* (b) positive feelings (i.e., empathy) toward the offender are increased. We measured each aspect of this definition—the reduction of revenge and avoidance and the increase in empathic feelings—separately so that we could investigate any unique effects on the separate components.

Revenge and avoidance. The level of motivation to seek revenge against and avoid a specific offender was measured using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998). The TRIM is comprised of 12 self-report items that measure the participants' level of unforgiveness for an offender. The TRIM is comprised of a

[1] To double check the accuracy of our decision to collapse participants across group conditions for our main analyses, we conducted separate paired sample t-tests for men (n's = 11, 12, & 10) and women (n's = 40, 37, & 34) in each treatment condition (full forgiveness, partial forgiveness, and stress reduction, respectively). The pattern of results was the same as we report below in the Results section, with men not improving on any of the outcomes over time and women improving. There was one exception: In these results, women in the separate conditions did not significantly improve in empathy, whereas in the total sample reported below they did. However, even in the total sample of women the overall effect was quite modest ($d = .22$). Thus, there appears to be no differential effect for men and women across the treatment conditions and collapsing the participants across treatments conditions appears justified.

5-item Revenge subscale and a 7-item Avoidance subscale. Items, such as "I'll make him/her pay" (Revenge) and "I avoid him/her" (Avoidance), are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). Internal consistency reliability of the Revenge and Avoidance subscales has been estimated to range from .83 to .94 with 9-week test-retest reliabilities to be .65 and .64, respectively (McCullough et al., 1998). Validity has been established through correlations with theoretically related variables, such as empathy for the offender (*r*'s ranged from −.46 to −.80), apology (*r*'s ranged from −.32 to −.51), closeness before the offense (*r*'s ranged from −.13 to −.38), and dyadic adjustment (*r*'s ranged from −.32 to −.47; McCullough et al., 1998). In the present study, the internal reliability estimates were .90 and .92 for the Revenge subscale and .95 and .94 for the Avoidance subscale at pre and post intervention, respectively.

Empathy. The second aspect of our definition of forgiveness (i.e., the promotion of positive feelings for the offender) was operationalized as empathy for the offender. Empathy was measured using Batson's Empathy Adjectives (Batson, 1987, 1991). This scale measures one's level of state emotional empathy for a particular person. Participants rated eight affect words (such as "compassionate" and "concerned") using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all* and 6 = *extremely*) to indicate the degree to which they currently felt each emotion for the offender. Responses to the items on the scale are summed to represent the participant's level of empathy toward the offender. Estimates of internal reliability for this scale range from .79 to .95 (Batson, 1991). Construct validity has been demonstrated throughout an extensive research program that has used the BEA to validate experimental manipulations of empathy (Batson, 1991). In addition, concurrent validity has been evidenced in the relationship between this scale and other measures of empathy (for a review, see Batson, 1987). The estimates of internal reliability for the current sample are .93 and .94 at pre- and postintervention measurements, respectively.

Procedure

Participants attended two three-hour group sessions over two consecutive weeks, for a total treatment time of six hours. Each group was led by a single facilitator who followed manuals prepared for the different conditions (manuals are available upon request from Nathaniel G. Wade). There were three different treatment conditions to which participants were randomly assigned: two explicit forgiveness interventions (one containing a primary theoretical element and one not) and an alternative treatment focused on stress reduction information and techniques. The explicit forgiveness interventions were based on Worthington's (2001) REACH intervention. This treatment has five major components, each represented with a letter in the acronym REACH. These include, (R) recalling the hurt, building (E) empathy for the offending person, seeing forgiveness as an (A) altruistic gift, (C) committing to forgiveness, and (H) holding on to, or maintaining, forgiveness. All the groups were primarily psychoeducational in nature, making use of didactic material, personal sharing, and interactive exercises. Participants completed questionnaire packets one week prior to the intervention and one week following the termination of the intervention. For further details about the specific procedures of the study, see Wade, Worthington, & Haake (in press).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics for each outcome measure at pre- and postintervention for both men and women are reported in Table 1. As a preliminary analysis, we conducted separate paired-sample *t* tests for women and men (and the total sample) to assess change in each outcome variable over the course of treatment. Results indicated that women reported a significant improvement in all three outcomes over time, whereas the men did not report significant changes in any of the outcomes (see Table 1). Given the restriction in sample size for men, we were concerned that these differences might reflect low power. Therefore, we estimated the power of the paired sample test with our sample size ($n = 33$) given a clinically meaningful effect. To determine a clinically meaningful effect size, we used the average effect size of forgiveness treatments published in a recent meta-analysis (ES = .57, Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005). Given these parameters, our

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Paired-Sample t-Tests, and Effect Sizes Comparing Treatment Efficacy by Gender Over Time

	Revenge				Avoidance				Empathy			
Participants	Pre	Post	*t*	*d*[a]	Pre	Post	*t*	*d*	Pre	Post	*t*	*d*
Women	10.5 (5.1)	8.2 (3.9)	5.88*	−.51	23.7 (8.7)	20.2 (8.5)	5.76*	−.41	17.0 (9.2)	19.1 (9.9)	−3.12*	.22
Men	10.7 (5.6)	10.4 (4.7)	0.34	−.06	22.6 (8.6)	21.0 (8.3)	1.22	−.19	18.2 (9.1)	17.5 (9.1)	0.44	−.08
Total	10.6 (5.2)	8.7 (4.2)	5.11*	−.40	23.4 (8.7)	20.4 (8.5)	5.50*	−.35	17.3 (9.1)	18.8 (9.7)	−2.45	.16

Note. Total $N = 144$; Women $n = 111$; Men $n = 33$. Means are provided with standard deviations in parentheses below.

[a] Effect size as measured with Cohen's $d = \frac{M_{post} - M_{pre}}{SD_{pooled}}$.

* $p < .006$ (Bonferroni-corrected alpha for nine paired comparisons).

power for each of the separate outcomes was more than adequate (.95). Even using the lower bound of the 95% confidence interval on the average ES published by Wade et al. (.51), power for the separate analyses for men were all greater than .89. Thus, our analyses had adequate power to detect meaningful change, but would be less likely to find a small significant effect, if it existed.

Main Analyses

Although the above analyses indicated that men and women might differ in their response to the group treatment we provided, the paired sample tests did not include the predictors of interest. Thus, we conducted three hierarchical multilevel regressions to predict postintervention outcome with participant sex, the number of men per group, and their interaction, after accounting for preintervention scores. In this way we compared women's and men's responses directly, included the number of men in each group as a variable, and tested their interaction. For the multilevel analyses, we included the particular group that each participant attended as a random factor and sex, the number of men in the group, and their interaction as fixed factors. This enabled us to account for the dependence of the data created by the nested structure of the design (participants within groups) and to model the effects of individual and group level data. Correlations among the criterion variables are reported in Table 2. Results from the regression analyses are listed in Table 3 and reported below, organized by the different predictors.

Sex. Sex predicted outcome for revenge ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .001$), but not for avoidance or empathy (see Table 3). Closer examination of this effect for revenge indicated that following the intervention, the women reported significantly less desire for revenge than the men did after controlling for their preintervention scores. The lack of a significant sex effect for avoidance and empathy casts doubt on any direct

Table 2
Correlations Among Outcome Variables

Outcome variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Revenge (pre)	1					
Revenge (post)	.61***	1				
Avoidance (pre)	.51***	.35***	1			
Avoidance (post)	.45***	.45***	.71***	1		
Empathy (pre)	−.35***	−.19*	−.52***	−.38***	1	
Empathy (post)	−.41***	−.33***	−.46***	−.47***	.69***	1

Note. $N = 144$.
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

differences between men and women on these outcomes.

Number of men in each group. Beyond the effect of sex, the number of men in the group was related to the desire for revenge ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$), but not to avoidance or empathy (see Table 3). The presence of more male members in a particular group was related to greater reduction in the desire for revenge. Our results indicate that perhaps having more men in a group that is attempting to promote forgiveness may be beneficial for both men and women in their efforts to reduce revenge, but may not help to reduce avoidance or increase empathy.

Interaction. The interaction term was not significant for revenge (see Table 3). However, because the results from the preliminary paired-sample *t* tests indicated that men, in general, did not reduce their desire for revenge (see Table 1) and, because women outnumbered men in this study, we were skeptical of the positive relationship between the number of men in the group and the reduction of revenge for all participants. We suspected that perhaps for the male participants this effect was not significant. Therefore, we tested whether this relationship existed for both women and men by means of two post hoc simultaneous multilevel regression analyses (one for women and one for men while still controlling for the nested structure of the data). Preintervention revenge scores and the number of men in a group were the fixed effects and the separate group participants attended was the random effect (sex and the interaction were left out because the analyses were split by sex). The two regressions indicated that the number of men in the group significantly predicted the reduction in desires for revenge beyond preintervention scores for women only (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .49$, $b = -1.02$, $SE = .31$, $p < .001$), such that as the number of men in the group increased, the desires for revenge in female group members decreased. For men, desires for revenge at postintervention were not related to the number of men in the group (*Adjusted* $R^2 = .39$, $b = -.81$, $SE = .78$, $p = .32$). Thus, the finding that the number of men in a given group predicts reduction in the desire for revenge found in the initial regression appears to hold only for women and not for men.

Returning to the primary multilevel regression analyses, the interaction between participant sex and the number of men in the group was not significant for predicting avoidance (see Table 3). The interaction did, however, predict empathy following the interventions ($\beta = .27$,

Table 3
Multi-level Regression Analyses Predicting Revenge, Avoidance, and Empathy

Outcomes[a]	Predictors	ΔR^2	β	*b*	*SE*
Revenge					
	Step 1: Revenge (Pre-intervention)	.37	.61	.50***	.05
	Step 2: Sex[b]	.09	.21	2.50***	.61
	Number of men		.25	.95***	.31
	Step 3: Interaction	.00	−.07	−.26	.64
Avoidance					
	Step 1: Avoidance (Pre-intervention)	.50	.71	.68***	.06
	Step 2: Sex	.01	.09	1.81	1.19
	Number of men		.08	.74	.55
	Step 3: Interaction	.00	−.02	−1.29	1.22
Empathy					
	Step 1: Empathy (Pre-intervention)	.47	.69	.73*	.06
	Step 2: Sex	.01	.11	2.41	1.40
	Number of men		−.01	−.10	.62
	Step 3: Interaction	.02	.27	3.18*	1.42

Note. ΔR^2 = change in R^2 from step to step. ΔR^2 and β were calculated from traditional hierarchical regressions because they do not depend upon the Standard Error. The *b* and *SE* were estimated with multi-level regression analyses to account for participants being nested within groups. "Interaction" is the interaction between participant sex and the number of men in the participant's group.

[a] Outcomes were organized so that more change corresponds to more positive change in the specific outcome (reduction in revenge and avoidance and increase in empathy). [b] Sex was coded as men = 0 and women = 1.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

$p < .05$). We further analyzed the interaction by calculating the slopes of the regression lines for men (= 0) and women (= 1) separately. For men, more men in the group was related to less change in empathy (slope = −2.5), whereas for women there was a positive relationship between the number of men in the group and empathy (slope = .68), although this relationship was not significant.

Discussion

Two of the most significant findings of the present study were that both the participants' sex and the number of men in each group were related to some of the forgiveness-related outcomes. Specifically, the reduction in desires for revenge toward the offender over time was significant for women but not for men, indicating that, overall, men might not respond as well to treatments that promote forgiveness. In addition, the number of men in the group was negatively related to desires for revenge for women and empathy for men.

The data from this study partially support our hypotheses about the relationship between sex and response to group treatment. Our initial *t* tests indicated that women reduced desires for revenge and avoidance and increased empathy, whereas the men did not. This suggests that group treatments of this type might be helpful for women and not for men. However, in the direct comparisons between the sexes, only revenge outcomes were significantly different between women and men; there were no differences in avoidance or empathy.

Furthermore, the sex differences we observed do not appear to be accounted for by the number of men in each group. In fact, overall, our predictions about the effect of the number of men in each group were not supported. In direct contrast to our hypothesis, empathy in male participants had a negative relationship with the number of men in each group, such that the more men present, the less empathy the men developed for their offenders. This finding supports the hypothesis that, in treatment groups, gender stereotypes may play a role in men's willingness to forgive. Previous studies utilizing self-reports of empathy have found some evidence that men are less empathic than women (DiLalla, Hull, & Dorsey, 2004; Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983; Gault & Sabini, 2000; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002). Although this may indicate a nurturing ability in women brought about by the socialization into a feminine gender role (Lennon & Eisenberg, 1987), there may also be a motivational component for men. In an innovative study of empathy, Klein and Hodges (2001) examined the impact of incentive on empathic ability. In the absence of a monetary incentive, men displayed less accuracy in inferring the thoughts and feelings of others than did women. However, when participants were paid for their empathic accuracy, men performed on par with women. Without monetary incentive, men may have played out the gender role that encourages men to be less empathic. In our study, male participants in the groups that contained more men may have felt greater pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, which limited the development of empathy. On the other hand, the men who had fewer male counterparts in their groups may have felt more freedom to engage in empathic responses.

In further contrast to our hypothesis about the effect of the number of men in a group, women appeared to benefit from the increased presence of men in the groups. Women who were in groups with a greater male presence reported a greater reduction in desires for revenge. One possible explanation for this relationship is that the greater the number of men in a group, the more opportunities women had to understand male perspectives and to experience corrective emotional experiences with men (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). This variable might be particularly salient in the present study because the participants were focusing on a specific offender and were trying to come to terms with a specific offense. Of the offenses reported by female participants, about 60% were committed by males. Having more men in the group, then, would provide a richer social microcosm for the women to experience healing and growth (Yalom & Lesczc, 2005). In groups with fewer or no men, the male perspective may have been muted or absent, rendering corrective emotional experiences less likely.

If the number of men in a given group did not predict avoidance and empathy outcomes over and above the effects of sex, what is it about sex that is linked to treatment response in these cases? One possibility is that socialization leads to gender role-adherent behavior. The traditional male gender role might be incongruent

with many psychological treatments (Levant, 2001). This could certainly be true with the typical interventions that have been used to promote forgiveness, in that most forgiveness treatments focus on expressing the emotional pain associated with the hurt and developing empathy for the offenders (Wade & Worthington, 2005). These can be difficult tasks for the more traditional, gender role-adherent male (Levant, 2001). Also, prior research suggests that group members whose sex do not match the gender-orientation of a group's task tend to fare worse than members whose sex matches (Karakowsky, McBey, & Chuang, 2004; Karakowsky & Siegel, 1999). Perhaps if the focus of the groups was changed to reflect a more gender-neutral or masculine task, men might benefit more. The impact that this might have for women would also be important to investigate and monitor.

Limitations

Although this study explores important research questions that have not yet been probed in the forgiveness intervention literature, some limitations should be noted. First, this data analysis is an exploration of previously existing data. The study was not originally created for the purposes of sex analyses and is, therefore, more vulnerable to capitalization of chance findings. These data need to be corroborated by future research that specifically explores the role of sex and gender roles on response to treatment. However, some corroborating evidence already exists. In another intervention study to promote forgiveness, a similar sex effect was found; the women responded more favorably to one of the two treatments than did the men (Rye, personal communication, November 4, 2005). However, these analyses were not reported in the publication of this data (Rye et al., 2005).

Because the present investigation was an ex post facto analysis of existing data, no data from measures known to be interrelated with sex, such as adherence to traditional gender roles, were available. Therefore, we were unable to separately analyze other variables that might be related to, but distinct from, the participants' sex. Measures of gender role conflict (e.g., Good et al., 1995; O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986), or masculinity/femininity (e.g., Bem, 1974) would help to understand our findings in greater depth.

Finally, the implications of the results are limited to the specific sample we used and outcome variables that we explored. The sample was recruited from a college student population who were not necessarily psychologically impaired. Thus, our participants may not be representative of clients seeking group therapy. However, our sample is consistent with some client populations, particularly those in university counseling centers. On measures that were available to us (revenge and avoidance and types of hurts), the participants in this study were similar to clients from three university counseling centers who were struggling with past hurts (Wade, Bailey, & Shaffer, 2005). However, caution with generalization is still encouraged until these data are replicated in other samples. Also, because we conducted an intervention to promote forgiveness, we were primarily interested in forgiveness-related outcomes. However, the lack of supplementary outcome data, such as psychological symptoms or interpersonal functioning, prevents us from making more generalized conclusions from the present work. Our data do not address, for example, whether the treatment groups help men and women to reduce anger, fear, or depression or increase social functioning. Although forgiveness-related outcomes differed for women and men, these and other outcomes might not.

Implications and Future Research

The need to design treatments that work for men. The primary implication of the present study is that effective forgiveness-related interventions may need to be designed, developed, and implemented specifically for men. There are several ways to do this. One possibility is to alter existing treatments in ways that capitalize on the strengths that men bring to therapy. For example, rather than focusing treatments on expressing feelings and developing empathy, treatments intended to reach men might include investigating the pros and cons of anger, the interpersonal responsibility to family and community to consider forgiveness as a response to being offended, and providing examples of respected men who have chosen forgiveness. In addition, treatments might include a more compelling rationale for expressing emotion and

building empathy for offenders. Motivating men to employ empathic approaches/tactics appears to be effective; men can empathize if given adequate reason (Klein & Hodges, 2001). With a compelling rationale, men might also be more accepting of instruction on how to identify and express feelings related to a hurtful experience (Sternbach, 2003). Finally, framing the treatment in terms that address men's perceived needs (e.g., to be strong, courageous, and in control) can be valuable in efforts to reach and help men. An excellent example of how mental health treatment can be expressly framed for men is the National Institute of Mental Health's "Real Men. Real Depression." campaign (2005). Approaches that reframe forgiveness as releasing a grudge or overcoming anger might be more acceptable to gender role-adherent males than explicitly identifying forgiveness as a goal. However, before truly effective interventions for promoting forgiveness in men can be created, more information is needed about the differential response mechanisms of the sexes to treatment.

Exploration of possible mechanisms responsible for sex effects. Any number of factors could play a causal role in the differential responses of men and women obtained in this study. One primary hypothesis offered in this article is that adherence to traditional gender roles might affect the responses of both men and women. Gender role-adherent males might be inclined to hold on to emotions that are socially sanctioned for men, such as anger and desire for revenge. Gender role-adherent women might be more willing to empathize, show compassion and understanding, and release anger, as these responses are more often sanctioned for women (Kopper & Epperson, 1996). However, other causal factors might be examined as well, ranging from possible biological influences to treatment process issues.

Further exploration of the effects of group dynamics in group treatment for past hurts. Another important implication is the composition of both forgiveness-related and general process treatment groups. The present work supports efforts to create a social microcosm that reflects the world the group participants inhabit by including males and females together in forgiveness-focused groups. In the present study, women experienced greater reductions in desires for revenge when there were more men in the group. Thus, for women, having more men in the group seemed to be a direct benefit, perhaps by providing them with a greater diversity of opinions, experiences, and ideas. The results for the men were less conclusive. When it comes to developing empathy, more rather than less men in the group appeared to inhibit men's development of empathy for their offenders. However, we did not have any comparison groups in which men made up the majority or the entirety of the group membership. Some therapists specializing in men's issues have claimed that men do better in all-male groups (e.g., Andronico, 1997). It may be that in all male forgiveness groups men may actually improve more. Without a comparison group containing only men in this study, this question is left largely unanswered. More research is needed to investigate how group membership, personal characteristics, and group process interact to promote optimal outcomes for women and men.

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