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Early Adolescents' Forgiveness of Parents: An Analysis of Determinants

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ABSTRACT

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The current study examined forgiveness within the parent-adolescent relationship. Theoretical foundations and definitions of forgiveness were examined, after which a relational approach to forgiveness was explored. The direct influences of the quality of mother- and father-child relationships (parent and observed reports) and modeled marital forgiveness on early adolescents' forgiveness toward both mothers and fathers (child report) were examined; the mediating roles of parent forgiveness of child and adolescent social-cognitive skills (empathy and emotional regulation) were also analyzed. Mother, father, and child self-reported questionnaires and in-home observational data were taken from Time 1 and Time 3 (two years later) of the *Flourishing Families Project* and included reports from 334 two-parent families with an early adolescent child (*M* age of child at Time 1 = 11.24). Structural equation modeling was utilized to examine relationships between the variables. Mother- and father-child relational variables (both parent self-reports and observed reports at Time 1) were found to be significantly related to mother and father forgiveness of the adolescent child two years later. Interestingly, only mother forgiveness of the child was significantly related to adolescent forgiveness of the mother. Further, father forgiveness of mother (spouse report at Time 1) was directly related to adolescent forgiveness of the father. In addition, direct significant paths from parent-child relational variables to adolescent forgiveness were from the mother's report of connectedness with the child as well as observed reports of father-child connectedness. Significant indirect paths were also found: Observations of warmth within the mother-child dyad influenced adolescent forgiveness toward parents via empathy, while father's report of connectedness influenced adolescent forgiveness via emotional regulation. Finally, empathy and emotional regulation were the most salient direct precursors of adolescent forgiveness of parents. The relevance of modeling for forgiveness research, unique contributions of mothers and fathers, differences by reporter, developmental aspects of forgiveness in adolescence, and the importance of studying forgiveness within the parent-child relationship were discussed.

Keywords: forgiveness, adolescence, parenting, relationships

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The ability to treat an offender with love and beneficence, willfully abandoning the resentment and pain from an offense, has intrigued the writers of philosophy, theology, and history through the ages. This human process, called forgiveness, has been hailed as restorative, humanizing, healthy, and sublime for the lives of those it affects (see Park & Enright, 1997). While the importance of forgiveness has been repeatedly discussed and explained, philosophers, historians, and theologians have debated the meaning and process of forgiveness for some time (see Hope, 1987; McCullough, Sandage, Brown, Rachel, Worthington, & Hight, 1998). However, it was not until recently that these ideas have been translated into theory and empirical research. Clinicians have been employing forgiveness in clinical practice since the middle of the 1900s (see DiBlasio & Benda, 2008), but only the recent decade has seen a burgeoning of empirical research in this area (Fincham, 2000). As noted by Mullet, Girard, and Bakhshi (2004), interpersonal forgiveness has received empirical attention from cognitive, developmental, social, and clinical psychologists. However, while the increase in research on forgiveness has been beneficial to understanding the role and function of forgiveness in individuals, less research has specifically targeted how forgiveness operates within close relationships. Social science research in this area has been growing, but has largely focused on close adult relationships, specifically dating and married couples (e.g. Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004). In contrast, some researchers have begun to examine forgiveness within other types of family relationships, but only a few studies to date have targeted forgiveness within the parent-child relationship (see Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to

examine what factors may influence adolescents' forgiveness within the parent-child relationship.

The Importance of Forgiveness

As described by Park and Enright (1997, p. 393) above, “The importance of forgiveness in human life is expressed throughout historical, theological, philosophical, and psychotherapeutic literature.” People seem to recognize forgiveness as an important and valuable process, describing it as a human strength (Harris & Thoresen, 2003) and worthy of striving for (Enright, 1994). Research has pointed to a multitude of benefits associated with forgiveness in relationships and individually.

The relational benefits of forgiveness have been noted frequently in the literature (see Hope, 1987; Maio et al., 2008; McCullough & Worthington, 1994). For example, forgiveness is considered important in the successful maintenance of relationships (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007), especially during the ruptures caused by transgressions and hurts (Fincham & Beach, 2002). Indeed, the process of forgiving others has been shown to enhance the relationships of intimate couples, families, communities, and nations (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Among adults, clinical and empirical studies have begun to demonstrate how forgiveness helps heal damaged relationships by restoring harmony, releasing anger, and healing emotional wounds (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008; McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Paleari et al., 2003). Greater levels of forgiveness have been associated with greater empathy (McCullough, et al., 1998), improved communication and decreased psychological aggression (Fincham & Beach, 2002), and higher levels of relational adjustment (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005). Increases in marital satisfaction, including measures of intimacy and closeness, and decreases in marital conflict have been repeatedly linked to the ability to forgive (DiBlasio & Benda, 2008; Fincham & Beach, 2002; Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Rosen-Grandon, Myers, & Hattie, 2004). In a

recent study by Paleari et al. (2005), spouses learning to forgive one another reported that seeking and granting forgiveness were of primary importance in maintaining a healthy marriage.

In addition, personal benefits experienced by forgiving individuals range from cognitive to emotional to physiological (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). In a study by Witvliet et al. (2001), responses and thoughts that are forgiving in nature prompted significantly lower levels of physiological stress. In addition, Harris and Thoresen (2003) have suggested that forgiveness can be used effectively by health psychologists to aid in counseling and improving social and physical well-being. For adults, forgiveness interventions have also demonstrated efficacy in dealing with and overcoming family-of-origin issues (Hope, 1987) and past sexual abuse (Freedman & Enright, 1996). In addition, forgiveness of others and forgiveness of self have been associated with less depression (Lawler et al., 2005; Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson-Rose, 2008), stress (Berry & Worthington, 2001), and anxiety (Subkoviak et al., 1995), as well as increased physical health (Lawler-Row, Karremans, Scott, Edlis-Matityahou, & Edwards, 2008), life satisfaction (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003), and hope (Rye et al., 2001).

While the majority of research highlighting the benefits of forgiveness has employed adult samples, relational and individual benefits have also been noted in the smaller amount of literature on adolescents. Relationally, Paleari et al. (2003) found that adolescents who forgave were more likely to avoid damaging conflict with their parents after parental transgressions. However, little research has examined the relational nature and benefits of forgiveness during the adolescent time period, and some development viewpoints suggest that children at these ages may not engage in forgiveness and experience relational benefits similarly to adults. However, other researchers have noted that even young children recognize and experience the benefits of

forgiveness (Fincham, 2000). Additionally, existing theories on human forgiveness suggest that any individuals experiencing forgiveness in their relationships will experience associated relational benefits such as restored relational harmony and healed emotional wounds (see McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Paleari et al., 2003). In regard to individual benefits, children who have been through clinical forgiveness interventions have less anxiety, depression, anger, and guilt (Al-Mabuk & Downs, 1996; Denham, Neal, & Bassett, 2004; Freedman & Knupp, 2003) than children who were not taught to forgive. In an empirical sample of 615 adolescents from diverse ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, forgiveness was associated with fewer depressive symptoms in girls (Desrosiers & Miller, 2007). Forgiveness in adolescence has also been linked with lower rates of delinquency (Benda, 2002; DiBlasio & Benda, 2002) and higher levels of physical health (Baskin & Enright, 2004). In addition, forgiving children tend to have higher levels of hope, self-esteem, and empathy (Al-Mabuk & Downs, 1996; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Freedman & Knupp, 2003). While the literature is still relatively limited, research is consistently showing that adolescents appear to receive the associated benefits of forgiveness within their developmental stage. Although forgiveness may develop and function differently within adolescence, the benefits of forgiving may be received by all who are able to engage in the process, regardless of age. As Klatt and Enright (2009) suggest, discovering the processes of forgiveness in adolescence will help researchers, clinicians, and educators promote healthy adolescent development.

Defining Forgiveness

Given that forgiveness promotes positive relational and individual benefits, the study of forgiveness within the parent-child relationship is an important endeavor. However, prior to examining the specifics of forgiveness within the parent-child dyad, it is essential to understand

the meaning of forgiveness in general. Four broad facets will be discussed in examining the definition of forgiveness: cognitive versus affective processes, active nature, distinguishing from other constructs, and state versus trait forgiveness.

Defining forgiveness has been an ongoing and collaborative effort across multiple disciplines (North, 1987; Subkoviak et al., 1995). Nevertheless, despite the multiplicity of definitions, there is a consensus that, at a basic level, forgiveness involves a movement from negative to positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). The process of how this movement occurs, and what factors are responsible for making this shift, continue to be debated and hypothesized. A central issue of this theoretical debate is whether determinants of forgiveness primarily stem from cognitive or affective processes. Work utilizing the early theoretical perspective of Enright and associates (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989) seems to focus on cognition and marginalizes the role of affect. For example, according to Enright and Fitzgibbons, “People, upon rationally determining that they have been unfairly treated, forgive when they wishfully abandon resentment and related responses (to which they have a right), and endeavor to respond to the wrongdoer based on the moral principle of beneficence, which may include compassion, unconditional worth, generosity, and moral love (to which the wrongdoer, by nature of the hurtful act or acts, has no right)” (2000, p. 24). While this definition certainly includes emotion in the process of forgiveness, the fundamental actor in the process is cognition as the individual makes a rational decision according to moral principles (Enright et al., 1989).

In opposition to this fundamentally cognitive approach, others have defined forgiveness in primarily affective ways. Rusbult, Verrette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991), for example, describe important changes that occur during the process of forgiving, including a reduction in

negative affect (including anger and resentment) and an increase in positive affect such as sympathy, compassion, and love. These emotional changes are still accompanied by cognitive changes, but the focus here is on the critical changes in affect that bring about forgiving behaviors. Similarly, in the theoretical model of McCullough et al. (1998), affective social-cognitive variables, such as empathy, are posited as the most proximal determinants to forgiveness, with other cognitive variables, such as general styles of responding and personality traits, being the most causally distal. Thus, cognition and affect are both considered influential in the forgiveness process, but affect is purposefully emphasized.

However, despite definitions hailing either cognition or affect as the primary proximal determinants, many definitions include both cognition and affect as equally critical precursors to forgiveness. Such definitions support the predominant theoretical standpoints that include both cognition and affect, though perhaps in varying relevance, in the development and enactment of forgiveness. For example, Hodgson and Wertheim (2007) describe forgiveness as releasing negative emotions, thoughts, and behaviors toward the transgressor and transforming them into more positive emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Work by Subkoviak and colleagues (1995) indicates that while cognition and affect are both central to the forgiveness process, individuals change their cognitions more readily and easily than they change their affect toward the offender. Thus, despite the inclusion of both cognition and affect in defining forgiveness, many other situational factors may be constantly influencing not only the understanding of forgiveness, but the actual carried-out act of forgiving as well.

In addition to understanding important cognitive and affective determinants, many theorists have worked to clarify additional factors that define forgiveness. A recent development in this area is a push to recognize the active nature of forgiveness. Enright (2001), for example,

has asserted that forgiveness is a choice involving intentional effort. Likewise, Klatt and Enright suggest that “forgiveness is neither the result of a passive actor nor an environmental support; it is an active chosen course of behavior” (2009, p. 45). Likewise, Fow (1996) has explained that for forgiveness to take place, a person needs to have a transformation of feeling and understanding that offers a change in perspective. Thus, forgiveness is more than simply ridding oneself of anger; it is an active and voluntary change of attitude, requiring effort and control (Fredericks, 2004; Hope, 1987). This focus on individual choice highlights another important aspect of forgiveness as a process rather than a solitary act (Enright et al., 1989; Fincham, 2000; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998; Takaku, 2001).

In addition to determining what influences forgiveness and what forgiveness means, recent research has also offered further clarification by distinguishing forgiveness from similar constructs. For example, forgiveness has been differentiated from the similar construct of acceptance, often used in interventions. Fincham (2000) has argued that acceptance is closer to condoning or excusing the offense of the offender by placing the offense in a new context. However, forgiveness requires a culpable offense for the forgiver to forgive. Acceptance of the offense as understandable or tolerable would remove the need for forgiveness.

Accommodation is another construct similar to forgiveness that has been addressed in close relationship literature. Defined as the willingness to respond to an offense constructively rather than destructively, accommodation stresses that partners discern the reasons for the event (Rusbult, Yovetich, & Verette, 1996). However, like acceptance, often accommodation leads people to overlook or ignore the destructive nature of the offense, again nullifying the need for forgiveness (Fincham, 2000). Other researchers have demonstrated that forgiveness can also be distinguished from denial (being unwilling to perceive the offense), forgetting (removing the

awareness of the offense), and condoning (removing the offense and the need for forgiveness; Enright, 1991; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Kachadourian et al., 2004). In addition, researchers have argued that forgiveness of others is distinct from reconciliation (Fow, 1996; Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard, & Mullet, 2003). While forgiveness may not necessarily lead to a resuming or healing of the relationship, it certainly can be argued that forgiveness lays the groundwork for reconciliation to occur (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007). This distinction also provides the opportunity to view forgiveness as both an intra-individual process as well as an inter-individual process as the victim seeks to regulate personal emotions and thoughts and respond positively toward the offender (Rye & Pargament, 2002; Sastre et al., 2003).

Additionally, forgiveness may exist on different levels. For example, recent research has pointed to a distinct difference between a general tendency to forgive and forgiveness in specific situations. Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, and Wade (2005) discussed how trait forgiveness (a person's disposition to forgive transgressions over time and across situations) and state forgiveness (forgiving a specific transgression) must be analyzed and understood separately. Despite this distinction, most developmental research to date has focused solely on state forgiveness (Klatt & Enright, 2009). Unfortunately, little empirical work has been done to consider the development of trait, or dispositional, forgiveness. However, researchers have called for the furtherance of this work (see Klatt and Enright, 2009). One recent factor analysis, seeking to understand dispositional forgiveness in adolescents, found, from qualitative data, a structure of forgiveness constructs similar to those found in adults (propensity for lasting resentment, sensitivity to circumstances, willingness to forgive, and willingness to avenge; Chiaramello, Mesnil, Sastre, & Mullet, 2008).

Despite the complicated nature of forgiveness, most researchers agree that it is a complex

process involving cognitive, affective, and situational factors. While research to date has helped explain cognitive and affective processes and the active nature of forgiveness, distinguish forgiveness from similar constructs and explore trait and state forgiveness, there is still much work to be done. As stated previously, a growing area of research has begun to target how forgiveness operates within close relationships. This relational nature of forgiveness has driven the current study.

The Relational Nature of Forgiveness

From an evolutionary perspective, Gold and Davis (2005) argue that forgiveness is an adaptive human characteristic, proven throughout history to effectively preserve relationships and, by extension, the human race. Affective responses occurring after the transgression, namely remorse and empathy, ensure that the offended forgives the offender and that the relationship continues. Similarly, Fincham (2000), in his study on forgiveness within close relationships, posited two main assumptions about human behavior: humans are social creatures and humans harm one another. Given these assumptions, individuals are faced with the challenge of maintaining relatedness and closeness in relationships despite the inevitable pain associated with those relations. Because of the bonds and attachments formed in these close relationships, people are more likely to experience hurt from the transgressions of relational partners as well as be more motivated to work to maintain the relationship (see Gold & Davis, 2005; McCullough et al., 1998). Thus, the inevitability of hurt within interpersonal relationships requires the invention of some mechanism to overcome the hurt and continue the relationship. Many researchers agree that forgiveness is this mechanism (see Fincham, 2000; Kachadourian et al., 2004; Paleari et al., 2003). Close relationships will inherently include the shared history and emotional bonds of the relationship that influence forgiving above and beyond any tendency to forgive in other

situations (Kachadourian et al., 2004). Through forgiveness, people are able to reestablish relatedness and maintain a positive relationship.

The majority of research intended to test theories of interpersonal forgiveness has been done with close adult relationships such as dating and married couples (Gordon et al., 2009; Kachadourian et al., 2004). However, given that all relationships differ in function and type, it has been acknowledged that the process and purpose of forgiveness are dependent upon the relational context in which they occur (Maio et al., 2008). Thus, the extant literature on forgiveness within close adult relationships may not be sufficient in understanding other types of relationships, particularly within families. Indeed, research suggests that forgiveness functions differently in parent-child dyads than in marital dyads (Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005). To this point, few studies have examined forgiveness within the parent-child relationship specifically. Paleari et al. (2003) were the first to empirically study forgiveness within this relationship, and few studies have approached the task since (see Maio et al., 2008), despite calls for research that more closely examines the process of forgiveness within the parent-child relationship (Mullet, Riviere, & Munoz, 2006). Thus, in order to further understanding on how forgiveness functions within specific family relationships, the current study will examine forgiveness within the parent-child relationship.

Although relatively little is known about how forgiveness operates within the parent-child dyad, research on other types of close relationships, as well as knowledge from related domains of research, suggests that the quality of the parent-child bond may influence adolescent forgiveness directly as well as indirectly through modeling or the promotion of social-cognitive skills. A discussion of how relationship quality and modeled marital forgiveness may directly influence adolescent forgiveness will be given, followed by an examination of indirect influences

through modeled parent forgiveness of the child and social-cognitive mediators (e.g., empathy).

Parent-Child Relationship Quality As a Predictor of Adolescent Forgiveness

Studies on forgiveness in close adult relationships have indicated that the quality of the relationship is integral in determining forgiveness. For example, Kachadourian et al. (2004), in a study examining forgiveness in dating and marriage relationships, found that individuals who were securely attached to their partners were more likely to forgive their partner's transgressions. Additionally, Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, and Hannon (2002) found commitment to be the most salient predictor of forgiveness in dating relationships. In discussion of forgiveness within close interpersonal adult relationships, McCullough and associates (McCullough et al., 1997; McCullough et al., 1998) posited that, building upon interdependence theory, closeness would be positively linked to level of forgiving, and that forgiveness would occur more readily in satisfactory, committed relationships. These hypotheses were confirmed and pre-offense relational closeness was found to facilitate forgiveness.

While closeness within relationships is certainly salient to the development and enactment of forgiveness in adult romantic relationships, only one study has explored the link between closeness and forgiveness in parent-child dyads (Paleari et al., 2003), despite the call for researchers to examine findings from the adult relationship literature with children (Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, & Boyatsis, 2005). While a small direct effect from parent-child relationship quality to child forgiveness was acknowledged in this study, results clearly pointed to a significant indirect effect of relational closeness through other social-cognitive variables. In order to better understand how parent-child relationship quality influences adolescent forgiveness, the current study will examine the direct effects of relationship quality on adolescent forgiveness as well as indirect paths through modeling and social-cognitive mediators.

Parental Modeling

Relationally, parents and children are interacting continuously, and children are learning from these interactions in various ways. One form of interaction that may influence how well the child forgives the parent is the parents' modeled forgiveness in their marital and parenting relationships. For example, Mullet et al. (2004) reported that parent and child scores on conceptualizations of forgiveness were positively correlated, supporting the idea that conceptualizations of forgiveness are "partly transmitted through family education and family forgiveness practices" (p. 85). Indeed, researchers have noted that the family can be considered a "privileged theater" for forgiveness where forgiveness is experienced, learned, and practiced (Mullet et al., 2006). In attempting to examine parental effects on forgiveness, Subkoviak et al. (1995) found that parents and children were found to forgive to similar degrees in a subsample of parents and children experiencing similar levels of hurt—purportedly due to parental modeling of forgiveness. In addition, Maio and colleagues (2008) demonstrated how parents' forgiveness of their children and of each other led to parents' greater perceptions of being forgiven by the child one year later. Likewise, adolescents' levels of forgiveness in particular situations has been linked to the levels of forgiveness present in their mothers and fathers. This intergenerational transmission of forgiveness supports the modeling hypothesis that parents who model forgiving behavior are likely to pass on this value to their children. Research on modeling suggests that people, including children, tend to imitate behavior they observe in others (see Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002). Thus, children who observe their parents forgiving one another, and experience forgiveness from their parents, may be more likely to forgive others as well. In sum, parent-modeled forgiveness of spouse and child may directly influence adolescents' development of forgiveness.

While current research has supported the idea that forgiveness in parents is passed on to children through modeling, little research has focused on forgiveness within the parent-child dyad specifically or examined both parent forgiveness of spouse and child as indicators of child-reported forgiveness. This study will look at both types of modeled forgiveness as direct predictors of child forgiveness.

Forgiveness within the marital dyad is certainly salient to child forgiveness of the parents, but exists outside of the parent-child dyad specifically. Thus, parent forgiveness of the spouse at Time 1 will be examined on the same level as the quality of the parent-child relationship with indirect paths through adolescents' social-cognitive skills and parent-forgiveness of the child. Given research suggesting that modeling is critical for helping children learn proper expression of anger and emotion in order to forgive (Murray, 2002), marital forgiveness is expected to influence the development of adolescent social-cognitive skills, which in turn will be positively related to adolescent forgiveness of parents. Also, given research indicating that stable personal characteristics account for a significant percent of variance in people's willingness to forgive others (McCullough and Hoyt, 2002) and that positive family functioning in one dyad tends to resonate into positive functioning in other family dyads (Bowen, 1978), those who are more forgiving of their spouse are expected to be more forgiving of their children as well.

While parental forgiveness appears to influence the adolescent child's development of forgiveness through modeling, current research has yet to consider how the quality of the parent-child relationship influences these processes. Within the parent-child dyad, closeness may facilitate a greater willingness of parents to forgive their child of transgressions. The child, after seeing and experiencing this forgiveness, may reciprocate by forgiving the parents.

In addition to research on forgiveness, other related domains of research provide

additional theoretical insight into how the relationship-forgiveness link may function for parent-child dyads. Many researchers have referred to forgiveness as a prosocial behavior (see McCullough et al., 1997; Mullet et al., 2006). Research on socialization has asserted that prosocial behavior relates positively to parental warmth and is enhanced by parental modeling of helping behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), suggesting modeling as a mediator between closeness in the parent-child relationship and prosocial behaviors. Similarly, Bandura (1986) posited that children who are exposed to models of prosocial behavior will be more likely to emulate those behaviors, especially if the model has a close relationship with the child or is highly admired. Therefore, parental modeling of forgiveness may increase forgiveness in children if the parent-child relationship is positive. In accordance with the supporting evidence from previous research, the current study will examine modeled forgiveness on two levels, with parent forgiveness of the spouse hypothesized to influence adolescent forgiveness directly, as well as indirectly, through parent forgiveness of the child, and social-cognitive mediators.

Social-Cognitive Mediators

In addition to modeling behaviors, parents may help promote forgiveness in their children by fostering, through a positive and close relationship, the acquisition of social-cognitive skills required to forgive. According to the social-psychological framework presented by McCullough and colleagues (McCullough et al., 1998), relational variables (e.g., closeness) indirectly influence forgiveness in close relationships through social-cognitive forces (attributions, ruminations, and empathic emotions). Results from their 1998 study indicated that individuals experiencing higher levels of relational closeness were more likely to apologize and feel empathy for their partner, leading to greater forgiveness. Paleari et al. (2003) utilized and validated this framework in their empirical study on forgiveness within parent-adolescent

relationships. General relationship quality was found to only indirectly influence forgiveness within the adolescent child via attributions, affective reactions, and emotional empathy. Despite the limited research base on forgiveness within the parent-child relationship specifically, an understanding of what factors may act as mediators between the quality of the relationship and forgiveness may be taken from theoretical examination of the predictors of forgiveness, studies examining other close relationships, as well as research on the socialization of prosocial behaviors in adolescence. These three sources of information have indicated that empathy, perspective taking, and emotional regulation may be salient mediators in the relationship-forgiveness link.

Empathy and perspective taking. Empathy and perspective taking are related constructs that allow a person to understand the situation of others. Hodgson and Wertheim (2007) have explained that perspective taking and empathy are essentially two forms of empathy: the cognitive and the affective. Cognitively, the individual is able to take the perspective of others, and affectively, is able to experience the emotions or feelings of the other person. Thus, the cognitive ability of perspective taking is intimately tied to the affective components of empathy, but is a distinct social-cognitive process.

Based on previous research and theory, both empathy and perspective taking appear to be salient for forgiveness (Batson, Early, & Salvarani, 1997; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Malcolm & Greenburg, 2000; McCullough et al., 1998; Takaku, 2001). Previous research examining dating and marriage relationships suggests that closeness in the relationship operates as a facilitating construct allowing other important and more proximal determinants of forgiveness (e.g., empathy) to develop, which in turn lead to forgiveness (see McCullough et al., 1998). Empathy has been cited as the most salient mediator operating between close adult relationship

quality and forgiveness. However, studies trumpeting the importance of empathy often fail to distinguish between cognitive and affective empathy. However, some studies have specifically cited perspective taking, or the cognitive form of empathy, as an influential mediator (Gold & Davis, 2005; Takaku, 2001).

However, while the need for perspective taking fits well within the paradigms presented for adolescent development of forgiveness (Park & Enright, 1997), researchers have failed to test these ideas empirically. Research indicates that perspective taking abilities develop throughout childhood (see Smith & Hart, 2002), so, provided adolescents have developed this empathic tool, they ought to experience the process in similar ways as young adults and adults. The current study will be the first to examine this hypothesis by examining adolescent perspective taking abilities as both a predictor of and mediator to adolescent forgiveness.

In addition to forgiveness research, research on prosocial behaviors again offers insight into how forgiveness, as a prosocial construct, may operate for adolescents specifically. Prosocial behavior research supports the findings from the forgiveness literature that the parent-child bond may be mediated by forms of empathy. For example, research has indicated that parents indirectly influence the development of prosocial behaviors through sympathy and empathy (see Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Hoffman, 2001). Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, and Wilkinson (2007) also reported that responsiveness, indicative of a close emotional parent-child relationship, facilitated parent-adolescent interactions, which then led to greater sympathy and, finally, to prosocial behaviors in adolescent children. If forgiveness functions similarly to other prosocial behaviors, a close parent-child relationship may indirectly lead to forgiveness in the child through the promotion of social-cognitive skills such as empathy. Given the research on the predictors of forgiveness in other close relationships and the research on prosocial behaviors, the

current study will examine the indirect influence of parents' closeness with the child through the child's empathy and perspective taking abilities.

Emotional regulation. In addition to empathy and perspective taking, the adolescent's ability to regulate emotions may also lead to forgiveness. As explained previously, emotions play an important role in the development of forgiveness in conjunction with cognitions. According to Rizkalla, Wertheim, and Hodgson (2008), forgiveness requires the ability to, first, be aware of personal emotions (e.g. emotional intelligence, see Mayer & Salovey, 1997), and then to regulate, manage, and repair those emotions. Independent studies of emotional intelligence and the ability to manage and repair emotions is associated with greater disposition to forgive in college samples (Emmons, 2000; Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007). Thus, emotional awareness and management appear to be relevant to the development of forgiveness.

From an emotional regulation standpoint, "emotion regulation consists of the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson, 1994, p. 27). Many of the hormonal, neural, and cognitive systems believed to underlie and influence the development of emotional regulation are maturing during the adolescent period (Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003; Spear, 2000). Thus, due to the intense emotional experiences characteristic of adolescence and adolescents' newly emerging emotional management skills, adolescents are likely just beginning to learn forgiveness through empathic and affective avenues. During this developmental period, adolescents are likely learning how to handle transgressions against them emotionally and how to develop positive emotions toward their offenders.

In addition, research has indicated the importance of a close parent-child bond in the

development of adolescents' emotional regulation abilities (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). Thus, as children learn to regulate their emotions, they may also be more likely to forgive. The current study will be the first to include adolescent emotional regulation as a direct predictor and mediator of adolescent forgiveness.

Mother-Father Differences

The focus of the current study on forgiveness within the parent-child relationships is an important contribution to a small body of literature. However, in addition to examining parent-child effects, it may be important to analyze differences in how forgiveness operates within the mother-child and father-child dyads. Current research presents inconsistent evidence for differences in these dyads. Maio et al. (2008), for example, reported differences in the forgiveness relationships with each parent, which they claimed was influenced by evolutionary forces pushing the father to detach from the relationship with his child. However, two studies by Hoyt et al. (2005) revealed mixed results for adolescent differentiation between forgiveness in the father-child versus mother-child relationship. One study, comprised of eighth-grade adolescent boys and girls, suggested that adolescents had different forgiveness motivations and perceptions for the father versus the mother. However, in a second study with 12- to 14-year-olds, the adolescent children did not indicate differences in forgiveness motivations toward father and mother. Possible reasons for these contradictory findings are that the samples were from two different cultures (United States vs. Great Britain) and involved different genders (all girls vs. boys and girls). Despite the inconsistencies in forgiveness research, previous reviews of parenting in adolescence have indicated that adolescents report different perceptions of their relationships with mothers and fathers (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). This study will illuminate this issue by addressing forgiveness both within the mother- and father-child relationships.

Summary and Study Directions

The understanding of how forgiveness operates within the parent-adolescent relationship is limited and inconsistent. However, research based on other close relationships provides a basis for hypotheses within this particular relationship type. This study will examine the direct and indirect influences of parent-child relationship quality and modeled forgiveness within the marital relationship on the adolescent's subsequent forgiveness of the parent. It is expected that these variables will positively influence mediating variables of modeling (parent forgiveness of the child) as well as the social-cognitive skills of empathy, perspective taking, and emotional regulation in their children, measured two years later (Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Parent forgiveness of the child and the adolescents' social-cognitive skills are then expected to be associated with adolescent forgiveness of each parent. Direct effects of the parent-child relationship will be tested, but it is difficult to hypothesize whether they will be salient or not given the small research base (Paleari et al., 2003). A path model will help elucidate differences within mother-child and father-child dyads as well as which types of mediators may be most salient to adolescent forgiveness. Differences may be evident between the mother-child and father-child relationships given the current research (Hoyt et al., 2005).

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were taken from the *Flourishing Families Project* (FFP). The FFP is an ongoing, longitudinal study of inner family life involving families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14 at Time 1. Families were interviewed in their homes, with each interview consisting of a one-hour video and a one-and-one-half hour self-administered questionnaire at Time 1 and two years later at Time 2. For this study, both observational data and

questionnaire data were used for analysis.

This study consisted of a subset of 334 two-parent (mother and father) families from the original 500 family FFP sample. At Time 1, these families had a child between the ages of 11 and 14 (*M* age of child = 11.24). Roughly half of the adolescents sampled were male (*N* = 168 males, 166 females). Ninety-five percent of mothers and 93% of fathers reported being biological parents, 3% of mothers and 4% of fathers reported being adoptive parents, and 1% of mothers and 3% of fathers reported being step-parents. Seventy-six percent of families reported that all members of the family were European-American, 4% were all African American, 1% all Asian, and 19% of families reported that family members were multi-ethnic. Four percent of families reported an income less than $25,000 per year, 20% between $25,000 and $50,000 per year, and 76% more than $50,000 per year. In terms of education, 68% of mothers and 70% of fathers reported having a bachelor's degree or higher.

Procedure

Participant families for the FFP were selected from a large northwestern city and were interviewed during the first eight months of 2007 for Time 1 and during the summer months of 2009 for Time 2. Longitudinal retention of participating families was high (92%), with only 40 of 500 families not participating at Time 2. The most common reasons for non-participation at Time 2 included time concerns and the family having moved from the area. Families were primarily recruited using a purchased national telephone survey database (Polk Directories/ InfoUSA). This database claimed to contain 82 million households across the United States and had detailed information about each household, including presence and age of children. Families identified using the Polk Directory were randomly selected from targeted census tracts that mirrored the socio-economic and racial stratification of reports of local school districts. All

families with a child between the ages of 10 and 14 living within target census tracts were deemed eligible to participate in the FFP. However, the Polk Directory national database was generated using telephone, magazine, and internet subscription reports; so families of lower socio-economic status were under-represented. Therefore, in an attempt to more closely mirror the demographics of the local area, a limited number of families were recruited into the study through other means (e.g., referrals, fliers; n = 77, 15%). By broadening our approach, we were able to significantly increase the social-economic and ethnic diversity of the sample (although this is not reflected in the sample used in the current study, due to the focus on two-parent families). Preliminary analyses indicated that recruitment method and ethnicity were not significantly correlated with study variables. Families were interviewed in their homes, with each interview consisting of video tasks and questionnaires completed by the child, mother, and father. It is important to note that there were very little missing data. As interviewers collected each segment of the in-home interview, questionnaires were screened for missing answers and double marking.

Video tasks. Observations of the mother-child and father-child relationship were videotaped during in-home interviews at Time 1. The interaction tasks were timed for 25 minutes each following the protocol established by the Iowa State Coding Lab that developed the Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales. Each dyad was given a stack of cards with discussion questions and were instructed to discuss the questions one at a time until the timer went off and the interviewer returned. The cards were in the same order for each dyad. During a dyadic interaction the other parent was completing questionnaires, thus allowing for complete confidentiality and non-collaboration between dyads.

After the interview, trained coders watched video tapes of each parent and child dyad

and coded interactions using The Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales (Melby et al., 1998), which have been shown to be reliable and valid as assessed in several studies (see Melby, Conger & Puspitawaiti, 1999). The coding manual provided extensive descriptions of each scale as well as examples and non-examples of the codes. Prior to being able to code data for this project, coders participated in 90 hours of training, including tests over content of scales and practice coding with feedback from certified coders. Additionally, coders were required to code a criterion couple task that had also been coded by certified coders at the Iowa Behavioral and Social Science Research Institute and reach a minimum of 80% inter-rater agreement. Once a coder became certified, 25% of their coded tasks were also blindly assigned to a second coder.

Measures

Parent-child relationship quality. The quality of the parent-child relationship was assessed from two different perspectives at Time 1, including in-home video observations and parent-reported questionnaires. For this study, four dyadic interaction scales were used from in-home observations and combined into one composite scale: the levels of warmth/support expressed in both the parent and the child during interaction and the levels of reciprocated warmth/support in both parent and child.

On a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 9 (*mainly characteristic*) the warmth/support observation scale measured the degree to which the focal (mother, father, or child) expressed care and support for the other in the interaction. Coders took into account three types of behavior to score the interaction: nonverbal communication, including loving smiles and affectionate touching; supportiveness, such as showing concern, encouraging, or praising the other; and content, such as statements of liking, appreciation, care, affirmation, and empathy. In scoring for warmth/support coders were instructed to look for combinations of behaviors and

weigh affect and nonverbal behaviors more heavily than the content of statements.

The reciprocate warmth/support observation scale measured the degree to which the focal responded in like manner to the other's warm and supportive behaviors. On a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 9 (*mainly characteristic*), the coders indicated how the focal added to the warmth and support in the interaction and reciprocated (verbally and nonverbally) warm and supportive behavior occurring within the dyad. The scale assessed the focal's reciprocation of these behaviors, not the focal's initiated behaviors. The four interaction scales for each dyad were combined into one composite scale indicative of the warmth in each relationship. Reliability (Cronbach's α) for these scales were .71 for the mother-child dyad and .60 for the father-child dyad.

Mother and father reports of the quality of the parent-child relationship at Time 1 were also used as indicators in model analyses. The degree to which parents felt connected to the target child was assessed using nine items from the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001). Items were re-worded to focus on the parent-child relationship and parents responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*disagree*) to 6 (*agree*). While the original questionnaire in the FFP contained nine items, a factor analysis on these sample data indicated two distinct factors. One factor included negative parental perceptions of the parent-child relationship such as "I feel like an outsider with my child." Another factor included four items and expressed positive parental sentiment and connection to the child with items such as "I am able to relate to my child" and "I feel understood by my child." The four items from this positive parental connection to child were used in this study. Higher scores represented greater perceived levels of connection between the parent and their son/daughter. For the entire scale, reliability (Cronbach's α) was found to be .94 (Lee et al., 2001), and for this sample and this version of the

measure it was found to be .78 (mothers) and .83 (fathers).

Modeling of forgiveness. To measure parent-modeled forgiveness, parents responded to 12 questions proposed by McCullough et al. (1998). The 7-point Likert response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Subscales were used to determine forgiveness within the marital dyad as well as forgiveness from parent to child. At Time 1, each parent responded to questions about their spouse such as "He/she can forgive me pretty easily" and "He/she can give up the hurt and resentment toward me." Higher scores were indicative of greater perceived forgiveness from the spouse to the respondent. At Time 2, parents responded to questions about their child such as "I can forgive him/her pretty easily." Higher scores indicated greater forgiveness from parent to child. Previously, the reliability coefficient was found to be .88 (McCullough, et al, 1998). Reliability tests for this sample indicated a Cronbach's α of .92 (mother perception of forgiveness from spouse at Time 1), .89 (father perception of forgiveness from spouse at Time 1), .82 (mother-reported forgiveness of child at Time 2), and .83 (father-reported forgiveness of child at Time 2).

Social-cognitive skills. Three measures of social-cognitive and emotional functioning were examined at Time 2 as mediators between the quality of the parent-child relationship and adolescent forgiveness. Given the internal nature of such variables, the adolescents were chosen as the most accurate respondents for these processes. The child's abilities to be empathic and aware of others' perspectives were assessed via self-reports using a 14-item measure with two subscales: Empathy and Perspective Taking (Davis, 1983). Respondents answered how much they agreed or disagreed with statements, such as "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them" (empathy) and "I believe that there are two sides to every question and try to look at them both" (perspective taking). Based on a 5-point Likert

scale, responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). After reverse coding negatively worded items, higher scores indicated greater empathy and greater perspective taking ability. Previous reliability for this measure was found to be.72 for Empathy (Davis, 1983) and .85 for Perspective Taking. The Cronbach's alpha was found to be .85 (overall), .80 (empathy), and .77 (perspective taking) for this research sample. However, preliminary model analyses indicated that relationships between the variables were better represented by the model when only empathy was used. Given the moderately high correlation of the two constructs (.53), it is possible that the variance was being split between the two in the model. Thus, in order to best represent relationships between all study variables, perspective taking was removed from further analyses. This decision is supported by the more solid research base identifying emotional empathy as a particularly salient predictor of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1997; Paleari et al., 2003). In addition, evidence that individuals change their cognitions more readily than their emotions regarding an offender (Subkoviak et al., 1995) suggests that empathy may be considered one step closer to forgiveness, and therefore a more salient precursor.

The adolescent's ability to regulate emotions was also gathered from self reports at Time 2 using a revised 5-item version of the Novak and Clayton (2001) self-regulation measure. Adolescents responded to how much they agreed or disagreed with statements such as "I have a hard time controlling my temper" and "I get so frustrated I feel ready to explode." Responses ranged from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*) on a 5-point Likert scale. After reverse coding all five items, higher scores represented the child's ability to better regulate emotions. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was found to be .82.

Adolescent forgiveness of mothers and fathers. The adolescent's forgiveness of each parent was assessed at Time 2 using the same scale used to assess parental forgiveness

(McCullough et al., 1998). The adolescent responded to questions for mother and father separately including, “I can forgive him/her pretty easily” and “I can give up the hurt and resentment toward him/her.” The 7-point Likert response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Previously, the reliability coefficient was found to be .88 (McCullough, et al, 1998) and, for this sample, the Cronbach’s alpha was found to be .88 for mothers and .87 for fathers. As expected with an adolescent reporting on the same construct for mother and father, forgiveness toward mother and father were highly correlated (.71). Means and standard deviations for all variables are reported in Table 1.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

To determine if mean scores in the model were significantly different by ethnicity, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted but was not significant, indicating no significant differences by ethnicity. A MANOVA was also conducted to determine if study variables differed as a function of gender of the child. The MANOVA was significant, Wilk's Λ = .84; $F(12, 252) = 4.14$, $p = .000$. As follow-up tests to the MANOVA, univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted (see Table 1). Girls reported higher levels of empathy, $F(1, 252) = 34.95$, $p = .000$, whereas boys reported higher levels of emotional regulation , $F(1, 252) = 4.68$, $p = .031$. Compared to boys, girls also reported more forgiveness toward their fathers, $F(1, 252) = 5.20$, $p = .023$, and higher mean scores of observed warmth in the mother-child relationship, $F(1, 252) = 5.79$, $p = .017$. Differences by child gender in all other study variables were not significant. T-tests revealed that mothers reported higher levels of connectedness, M = 5.33 vs. 5.11, $t = 3.70$, $p = .000$, and greater levels of observed warmth with the adolescent child at Time 1, M = 3.02 vs. 2.85, $t = 3.05$, $p = .002$, as well as higher levels of forgiveness toward the

child at Time 2, M = 6.33 vs. 6.10, t = 3.58, p = .000, than did fathers. Fathers were perceived by mothers as having higher levels of forgiveness within the marital relationship, M = 5.52 vs. 5.24, t = 3.09, p = .002.

Bivariate correlations were conducted to determine the bivariate relations between all variables in the model (see Table 2). Indicators of the parent-child relationship were significantly correlated with one another, with the highest correlation being between the observations of each parent-child dyad, r =.39, $p < .01$. Perceptions of parental forgiveness within the marital dyad were also expectedly related, r =.25, $p < .01$, as well as mother and father self-reports of connectedness to the child and forgiveness toward the child, r = .25, $p < .01$; r = .38, $p < .01$. Nearly all study variables were significantly correlated with the outcome variables of adolescent forgiveness toward mother and father.

Model Analyses

Evaluation of the path model was conducted in AMOS 17.0 (Arbuckle, 2008). The initial evaluation began with a saturated model linking the six predictor variables (parent and observational reports of the quality of the relationship for each dyad and mother and father perceptions of spousal forgiveness at Time 1), to the four mediators (parent-reported forgiveness of the child and child-reported empathy and emotional regulation at Time 2), and finally to the two outcome variables (adolescent forgiveness toward mother and father at Time 2). Parent forgiveness of the child and social-cognitive mediators were then linked to adolescent forgiveness. Theoretically relevant error terms were allowed to correlate, indicating that these variables were influenced by similar outside sources not accounted for within the model. Although error and latent variable covariances are not shown in Figure 1 for parsimony, parent reports of connectedness and observational reports of warmth in the mother-child relationship, r

= .13, p = .012, and father-child relationship, r = .12, p = .019, were correlated with one another. Additionally, mother and father reports of connectedness, r = .17, p = .002, observational reports of warmth in each parent-child dyad, r = .37, p = .000, spouse reports of perceived forgiveness within the marital dyad, r = .25, p = .000, empathy and emotional regulation, r = .05, n.s., and adolescent forgiveness of mother and father, r = .65, p = .000, were correlated. The model was an acceptable fit for the data, with a comparative fit index (CFI) of .96 and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .07 (χ^2 = 34.90, p < .01, df = 14). The model accounted for 21% of the variance in adolescent forgiveness toward mothers and 24% toward fathers. Figure 1 presents standardized coefficients and significance levels for all significant paths, and Table 3 presents all direct, indirect, and total effects.

As seen in Figure 1, direct significant paths were as follows. Mother-reported connectedness to her adolescent child at Time 1 was directly related to her self-reported forgiveness of the child, β = .20, and the adolescent's self-reported forgiveness of the mother at Time 2, β = .12. Father-reported connectedness to his adolescent child at Time 1 was directly related to his forgiveness of the child, β = .34, and adolescents' emotional regulation at Time 2, β = .16. Observed warmth in each parent-child dyad was directly related to that same parent's forgiveness of the child at Time 2 (mother, β = .13; father, β = .12). Observed warmth in the mother-child dyad was also directly related to adolescent empathy at Time 2, β = .15, while observed warmth of father and child was related to adolescent forgiveness of mother at Time 2, β = .14. Perceptions of marital forgiveness at Time 1 were both related to father-reported forgiveness of the child at Time 2 (mother forgive father, β = .18; father forgive mother, β = .17). The father's forgiveness of mother (as perceived by mother) was also directly related to the adolescent child's forgiveness of the father at Time 2, β = .14. Mother forgiveness of the child, β

= .12, adolescent empathy, β = .27, and adolescent emotional regulation, β = .16, were also related to adolescent forgiveness of mother, while empathy, β = .32, and emotional regulation, β = .24, were related to forgiveness of father.

As seen in Table 3 (representing direct, indirect, and total effects for each variable in the analyses), empathy appears to have the largest total effect upon forgiveness toward mother, β = .27, and father, β = .32. For adolescent forgiveness toward mother, the quality of the mother-child relationship appears to have the next largest total effect, β = .16, followed closely by emotional regulation, β = .16. Emotional regulation, however, appears to be the second largest total effect, β = .24, for forgiveness toward father, followed by the quality of the mother-child relationship, β = .10.

In order to assess indirect or mediation effects, Sobel tests were conducted, which provided a direct test of simple mediation by comparing the strength of the indirect effect to the null hypothesis (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). These tests indicated that observed warmth in the mother-child relationship at Time 1 had a significant indirect link to adolescent forgiveness of both parents at Time 2 via empathy (child forgive mother, β = .04, Sobel = 2.18, p = .029; child forgive father, β = .05, Sobel = 2.24, p = .025); and that father-reported connectedness to the child at Time 1 had a significant indirect link to adolescent forgiveness of both parents via emotional regulation (child forgive mother, β = .03, Sobel = 2.04, p = .041; child forgive father, β = .04, Sobel = 2.41, p = .016). The indirect paths from Time 1 mother-child relational predictors (connectedness, β = .02, Sobel = 1.83, n.s.; observed warmth, β = .02, Sobel = 1.53, n.s.) to adolescent forgiveness of the mother at Time 2 were insignificant.

Gender

After the initial model was tested, a multi-group analysis was conducted to examine

gender differences in adolescents. The default model (wherein factor loadings were constrained to be equal for boys and girls) was compared to a model where all structural paths were freely estimated across groups. In order to have a clear understanding of all the pathways in these analyses, all pathways were left in the model, even though most of them were non-significant. A comparison of the two models indicated that the change in the χ^2 statistic was not significant, $\Delta\chi^2(44) = 48.108$, $p = .310$, indicating that the initial model did not function differently for boys and girls.

Discussion

This study provides important insight into what factors influence adolescents' forgiveness of their mothers and fathers over time. Results from multiple reporters (father, mother, child, and observational reports) indicated that the quality of the mother-child relationship influenced adolescents' level of forgiveness toward mother and father directly, as well as indirectly through the child's own social-cognitive skills (i.e., empathy and emotional regulation). Further, modeling hypotheses were partially supported and interesting differences in mother- and father-child relationships were noted.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality as a Predictor of Adolescent Forgiveness

Current researchers agree that the process and purpose of forgiveness are dependent upon the relational context in which they occur (see Maio et al., 2008; McCullough et al., 1997), although little work has examined the parent-child relationship as it relates to forgiveness. The current study adds to the existing literature by suggesting that forgiveness within the parent-child dyad may operate similarly to other dyadic relationships in that forgiveness is directly related to the quality of the relationship (see Kachadourian et al., 2004). However, the direct links from relationship variables to adolescent forgiveness that were found were in contrast to the limited

previous research examining forgiveness in the parent-child dyad, which found relatively few direct links (e.g. Paleari et al., 2003). The direct influence of the relationship on forgiveness may be due to the particular aspects of the parent-child relationship that were tapped in the current study. Indeed, Fincham (2000) theorized that it is not empirically justified to assume relationship quality functions the same in all relationships, and that more specific aspects of each relationship type ought to be examined. Thus, connectedness to the child and observed warmth in dyadic interactions may be more strongly related to adolescent forgiveness than variables assessed in previous work, such as commitment, intimacy, trust, and positive relational affect (see Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Future work should also strive to disentangle the particular aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship that may facilitate greater forgiveness. Given the changing dynamics in the parent-child relationship during adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002), warmth, autonomy granting, and communication may be particularly salient.

While the quality of the parent-child relationship appears to have some (albeit relatively small) direct relevance to adolescent forgiveness, the current study supported previous work indicating that relational variables are often manifest indirectly through more proximal social-cognitive traits (McCullough et al., 1998). As forgiveness is an internal process (Klatt & Enright, 2009), it is sensible that a close parent-child bond may be necessary, but not sufficient to lead adolescents to forgive their parents. Rather, the current study suggests that the critical and proximal skills of empathy and emotional regulation must be present, and research has indicated that these are certainly fostered by a close parent-child relationship (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson 2007; Morris et al., 2007). Indeed, the primary difference in the findings from the current study and work on other close relationships lies in the hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship. As opposed to adult relationships where social-cognitive

skills are developed previous to the relationship, these skills are fostered in children, at least in part, within the context of the parent-child relationship (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Thus, a positive parent-child relationship may lead not only to increased forgiveness within that particular relationship, but also extend to the child's future relationships because they have acquired the necessary social-cognitive skills in the home. This may be particularly important during adolescence as children seek greater autonomy from parents and more companionship with peers (Buhrmester, 1996; Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

The current study also provided added insight from observed reports of the quality of the parent-child relationship, whereas previous studies examining forgiveness within the parent-adolescent relationship only employed questionnaire data (Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Both parent-reported questionnaires and observational data were significantly associated with parent forgiveness of the child two years later, dispeling the idea that these variables may only be related due to shared method variance. In addition, the observational perspective of the parent-child relationship in this study offers a more complete picture of reality by demonstrating multiple perspectives (Cook & Goldstein, 1993), and it captures important paths to child forgiveness of the parents that may have been overlooked in previous studies. For example, observed warmth in the mother-child dyad at Time 1 was significantly related to adolescent empathy at Time 2, which in turn was a salient predictor of child forgiveness toward both mother and father. Additionally, observed warmth in the father-child dyad was directly related to child forgiveness of the mother two years later. Clearly, while questionnaire data offers a helpful starting point, future work needs to continue to employ observational methods to capture different aspects of the mother-child and father-child relationships and forgiveness.

Parental Modeling

The current study found partial support for the modeling hypotheses. Firstly, consistent with family systems theory (Bowen, 1978), marital forgiveness, by both mother and father, was related to father forgiveness of the child two years later. In this way, positive functioning in the marital dyad was found to resonate, perhaps influencing positive functioning within the father-child dyad. Fathers' marital forgiveness was also was directly related to child forgiveness of the father, suggesting that fathers play a unique role in modeling forgiveness for their children. Further, parental modeling within the parent-child relationship indicated that mothers' forgiveness of the child was significantly related to adolescents' returned forgiveness. These findings indicate that both levels of modeling (marital and parent-to-child) may be salient to adolescent forgiveness of parents. Children may benefit from seeing parents forgive one another as well as from personally experiencing forgiveness from their parents.

However, despite these findings, modeling variables were not as strongly related to adolescent forgiveness as hypothesized, thus raising the question of whether modeling is truly the operative function, as others have hypothesized (Maio et al., 2008; Murray, 2002). Most of the work suggesting modeling as a determinant of forgiveness has not empirically tested the salience of modeling variables on subsequent child forgiveness or included relationship and social-cognitive indicators in the analysis. By examining modeled forgiveness with relationship and social-cognitive variables, the current study suggests that perhaps modeling is not as significant a determinant as previously thought and that other relationship and personal variables may be more relevant. Furthermore, modeling, as described in the literature, occurs when children model behaviors they see others do (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002), yet forgiveness has been described as a slow process, which is difficult to observe in others (Mullet et al., 2004).

Perhaps adolescents do not specifically recognize forgiveness in their parents' relationship, just the general positive quality of their relationship promoted by such forgiveness. Future work should examine the influence of the quality of the marital relationship on adolescent forgiveness to determine if children are positively affected by a general positive atmosphere, and if these effects nullify modeling effects. Also, Murray (2002) posited that modeled forgiveness taught the skills necessary to forgive, but the current model indicated no significant paths from parent modeled forgiveness of each other and adolescent social-cognitive skills two years later. This may be a function of a two-year longitudinal design, but future work does need to address the mechanisms of the modeling influences.

Additionally, only mother forgiveness of the child and mother relationship variables (vs. father) significantly influenced adolescent forgiveness of mother, suggesting that the influence of modeled forgiveness from the mother may be more a function of the positive relationship rather than modeling. Interestingly, father forgiveness of the mother was related to adolescent forgiveness of the father. This may also be an indication of the close bond between mother and child. Perhaps adolescents, who feel closely bonded to their mothers, are more willing to forgive those who forgive their mothers. This may demonstrate a more indirect influence of the mother-child relationship on adolescent forgiveness. Future work needs to carefully examine relationship and modeling variables together to help determine if and how modeling makes a unique contribution to adolescent forgiveness of parents.

Social-Cognitive Mediators

Social-cognitive skills were found to be particularly salient predictors of forgiveness of both mothers and fathers, supporting previous research highlighting the importance of these skills in interpersonal forgiving (McCullough et al., 1998). As an internal process, it is

reasonable that the most salient precursors to forgiveness would be those that occur more immediately prior to decision and action. If adolescents have learned to have empathy for others and are capable of understanding and regulating personal emotions, they may be more likely to make the decision to forgive and follow through with supporting actions. Other studies have hailed the importance of empathy in forgiveness (see Fincham, 2000; McCullough et al., 1997; Denham et al., 2005), which the current findings support, but as illuminated by the current study, self-regulation plays a critical role as well, particularly for adolescents. Indeed, while the ability to regulate emotions is crucial for positive social competence in general (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992), theoretically it may also be crucial for forgiveness. As explained by Fincham (2000), forgiveness is intentional. Simply the passage of time is not enough to constitute true forgiveness, but rather the individual must choose to let go of hurt and resentful feelings and let positive emotions toward the offender take center stage. This process will certainly be facilitated by a dispositional ability to control emotions. Additionally, forgiveness is not immediately achieved, but rather comes through a process involving concerted effort on behalf of the forgiver (Enright et al., 1989; Fincham, 2000). The ability to maintain the desire and work required to achieve true forgiveness of others will likewise be aided if the individual is competent at regulating changes in emotions. Future work should include examination of emotional regulation as an important determinant of forgiveness.

Gender of the Parent and Child

Within the current model, empathy and self-regulation were influenced by the quality of the relationship in the mother-adolescent and father-adolescent dyads, respectively. In line with current research, these findings suggest that mothering may be more salient for the development of prosocial behaviors and empathy, while fathering may be uniquely important for adolescent

development of self-regulation (Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Padilla-Walker & Christensen, in press). Given the relative dearth of research on forgiveness within the parent-child relationship, this study benefitted from the inclusion of both mothers and fathers. The findings illustrate that, even in early adolescence, relational and dispositional factors are already functioning to influence the development of forgiveness toward mother and father, and that these influences persist over a two year span. Thus, it appears that mothers and fathers are differentially influencing social-cognitive development in their adolescent children, and mothers and fathers both play important and unique roles in fostering forgiveness within the adolescent relationship.

While both mothers and fathers are important for the development of forgiveness, the current model suggests that the mother-child relationship plays a central role in the adolescent forgiving both mother and father. As seen in Figure 1, social-cognitive skills are importantly related to adolescent forgiveness toward both parents, but all other paths related to adolescent forgiveness encompass some aspect of the mother-child relationship. Previous work has indicated that adolescent motivations for forgiving each parent differ (Hoyt et al., 2005). This study suggests that the personal relationship with the mother may be most critical for forgiveness of the mother, while social-cognitive skills and the fathers' forgiveness of mother may be most salient for forgiving the father. More research is needed examining both mother- and father-adolescent relationships to determine how mothers and fathers matter differently for the development of forgiveness as well as if adolescents truly forgive each parent differently and why.

The current study found mean differences favoring girls in terms of adolescents' empathy, which is consistent with existing research (e.g., Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), while boys had higher mean levels of emotional regulation than did girls. Divergent from previous work on forgiveness

in adolescence (Enright et al., 1989; Subkoviak et al., 1995), mean differences were found in adolescent forgiveness, favoring girls. Given the significantly higher levels of empathy of girls in this study, and the importance of empathy in promoting forgiveness within the current model, it may be that young adolescent girls are more sensitive to the feelings of others and thus more capable of making personal emotional and cognitive changes to forgive in response to these empathic cues. Early adolescent boys, on the other hand, may have greater abilities to regulate emotions but, without prevalent feelings of empathy for others, may not feel as motivated to make necessary changes to forgive. Future work should continue to examine these differences in early adolescence, as well as whether these mean differences exist in forgiveness toward strangers and within other types of relationships. Despite the few mean gender differences, there were no differences in how the parent-adolescent relationships and modeling influenced mediators and adolescent forgiveness in the overall model, consistent with previous work on forgiveness in the parent-adolescent relationship (Paleari et al., 2003). Future work should assess these issues through adolescence as parent-child communication and interactions change (Sartor & Youniss, 2002), and as strain and conflict in the parent-child relationship intensify (Steinberg, 2001).

Limitations

Although the current study benefitted from the strength of a longitudinal design, as well as the inclusion of multiple reporters, including observational methods, this study was not without limitations. Primarily, the current sample is not representative of all families in the United States, but rather, is representative of a non-clinical sample of families living in an urban setting. Also, this study only examined two-parent families, but adolescent forgiveness may develop and function differently in single-parent households. In addition, the current study was

unable to account for perspective taking due to measurement issues. Further, research on multiple reporters suggests that a latent model including perceptions of all family members and observed reports may be the most accurate method of determining the influence of family relationships (Cook & Goldstein, 1993). The current study was unable to use such models due to poor factor loadings between scales and gave a more fitting portrayal of each reporter's responses using individual scales. However, future work should attempt to use such latent models to improve modeling the true influence of family relationships on forgiveness. Finally, this study employed a short and general assessment of forgiveness that may not accurately capture the complexity of forgiveness within these relationships. However, one-item forgiveness measures have previously been highly correlated with more lengthy and complex forgiveness measures (Subkoviak et al., 1995), and responses to the single item, "I forgive my partner," have been closely aligned with behavioral tendencies (Finkel et al., 2002). While it is true that many other factors, such as motivations, degree of offense, time since offense, frequency of offense, and cognitive understanding of "forgiveness" may provide invaluable information on how forgiveness operates within the parent-adolescent relationship, the simple three-item measure employed in the current study provides a useful start to understanding forgiveness.

Conclusions

Despite these limitations, the two-year longitudinal design of the current study offers important insight into which relational and dispositional factors influence adolescent forgiveness of their mothers and fathers over time. Similar to work on adult relationships, this study highlights the importance of social-cognitive skills in forgiveness within the parent-child dyad (McCullough et al., 1998), but is the first to demonstrate the salience of emotional regulation for adolescent forgiveness. In addition, the current study emphasizes the direct, as well as indirect,

influence of the parent-child relationship, as assessed by multiple reporters. Further, results highlight the unique roles of mothers and fathers in socializing adolescent forgiveness and suggest that adolescents may be motivated to forgive each parent for different reasons. These findings are particularly salient in consideration of the sensitive developmental time-frame of early adolescence. Indeed, researchers have suggested that forgiveness is developmental (Subkoviak et al., 1995) and that the ability to forgive increases over the lifespan (Enright et al., 1989; Girard and Mullet, 1997). Thus, due to the relatively young age of the current sample, early adolescents may still be learning and conceptualizing this process. Researchers have also noted that during this critical developmental time frame, adolescents need an atmosphere that consistently challenges them to use forgiveness to resolve hurts (Enright et al., 1989). As conflict and change increase in parent-adolescent relationships (Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Steinberg, 2001), these parent-child relationships may be the optimal place for adolescents to learn what forgiveness means and how to use the skills needed to forgive. Thus, it is critical to continue to examine how parents socialize and influence the development of forgiveness for their adolescent children.

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Appendix A

Table 1

Mean Differences in Study Variables as a Function of Gender of Child (N = 334)

	Total Sample	Males	Females	
Variable:	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	F-value
M-C Connectedness (MR)	5.33 (.78)	5.30 (.71)	5.36 (.85)	.380
F-C Connectedness (FR)	5.11 (.89)	5.05 (.89)	5.18 (.88)	1.54
M-C Warmth (OR)	3.03 (.86)	2.90 (.71)	3.15 (.98)	5.79*
F-C Warmth (OR)	2.85 (.79)	2.76 (.72)	2.94 (.85)	3.79
M Forgiveness of F (FR)	5.28 (1.30)	5.23 (1.30)	5.32 (1.31)	.316
F Forgiveness of M (MR)	5.51 (1.36)	5.42 (1.38)	5.60 (1.33)	1.27
M Forgiveness of C (MR)	6.33 (.76)	6.30 (.79)	6.37 (.73)	.694
F Forgiveness of C (FR)	6.09 (.91)	6.01 (.93)	6.18 (.90)	2.28
Empathy (CR)	3.71 (.63)	3.50 (.60)	3.93 (.57)	34.95***
Emotional Regulation (CR)	3.97 (.67)	4.06 (.63)	3.88 (.70)	4.68*
C Forgiveness of M (CR)	5.43 (1.31)	5.28 (1.30)	5.57 (1.32)	3.25
C Forgiveness of F (CR)	5.49 (1.23)	5.32 (1.17)	5.66 (1.26)	5.20*

Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR= observational report, CR = child-report.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Correlations Between all Study Variables (N = 334)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. M-C Connectedness (MR)	-											
2. F-C Connectedness (FR)	.198**	-										
3. M-C Warmth (OR)	.194**	.169**	-									
4. F-C Warmth (OR)	.113*	.191**	.388**	-								
5. M Forgiveness of F (FR)	.096	.185**	.012	.021	-							
6. F Forgiveness of M (MR)	.104	.057	-.013	-.085	.245**	-						
7. M Forgiveness of C (MR)	.253**	.181**	.157**	.024	.156**	.137*	-					
8. F Forgiveness of C (FR)	.097	.382**	.053	.152*	.282**	.220**	.180**	-				
9. Empathy (CR)	.111	.029	.161**	.067	.118*	.091	.142*	.079	-			
10. Emotional regulation (CR)	.029	.171**	.021	.001	.086	.064	.053	.096	.059	-		
11. C Forgiveness of M (CR)	.226**	.177**	.167**	.183**	.175**	.142*	.224**	.111	.335**	.201**	-	
12. C Forgiveness of F (CR)	.153**	.143*	.139*	.125*	.094	.195**	.142*	.132*	.377**	.279**	.713**	-

Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR = observational report, CR = child-report.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 3

Unstandardized Coefficients, Standard Errors, Standardized Coefficients, and Significance Levels for Model in Figure 1 (N = 334)

Parameter Estimate	*Unstandardized*	*SE*	*Standardized*
M-C Connectedness → M Forgiveness of C	.197	.055	.202***
M-C Connectedness → F Forgiveness of C	-.005	.063	-.004
M-C Connectedness → Empathy	.059	.046	.073
M-C Connectedness → Emotional Regulation	-.010	.050	-.011
M-C Connectedness → C Forgiveness of M	.210	.093	.121*
M-C Connectedness → C Forgiveness of F	.118	.088	.071
F-C Connectedness → M Forgiveness of C	.096	.049	.110
F-C Connectedness → F Forgiveness of C	.346	.056	.335***
F-C Connectedness → Empathy	-.023	.042	-.033
F-C Connectedness → Emotional Regulation	.126	.045	.164**
F-C Connectedness → C Forgiveness of M	.120	.089	.077
F-C Connectedness → C Forgiveness of F	.064	.084	.043
M-C Warmth → M Forgiveness of C	.166	.053	.132*
M-C Warmth → F Forgiveness of C	-.050	.061	-.049
M-C Warmth → Empathy	.108	.045	.149*
M-C Warmth → Emotional Regulation	.010	.049	.012
M-C Warmth → C Forgiveness of M	.026	.090	.016
M-C Warmth → C Forgiveness of F	.044	.085	.029

Parameter Estimate	*Unstandardized*	*SE*	*Standardized*
F-C Warmth → M Forgiveness of C	-.059	.060	-.061
F-C Warmth → F Forgiveness of C	.143	.068	.124*
F-C Warmth → Empathy	.011	.051	.014
F-C Warmth → Emotional Regulation	-.019	.055	-.022
F-C Warmth → C Forgiveness of M	.249	.100	.143*
F-C Warmth → C Forgiveness of F	.138	.095	.083
M Forgiveness of F → M Forgiveness of C	.050	.033	.087
M Forgiveness of F → F Forgiveness of C	.124	.037	.181***
M Forgiveness of F → Empathy	.044	.028	.093
M Forgiveness of F → Emotional Regulation	.023	.030	.046
M Forgiveness of F → C Forgiveness of M	.082	.056	.079
M Forgiveness of F → C Forgiveness of F	-.036	.053	-.036
F Forgiveness of M → M Forgiveness of C	.046	.032	.082
F Forgiveness of M → F Forgiveness of C	.117	.037	.174***
F Forgiveness of M → Empathy	.029	.027	.062
F Forgiveness of M → Emotional Regulation	.020	.030	.039
F Forgiveness of M → C Forgiveness of M	.078	.055	.078
F Forgiveness of M → C Forgiveness of F	.140	.052	.144**
M Forgiveness of C → C Forgiveness of M	.204	.096	.115*
M Forgiveness of C → C Forgiveness of F	.040	.091	.024

Parameter Estimate	*Unstandardized*	*SE*	*Standardized*
F Forgiveness of C → C Forgiveness of M	-.086	.091	-.057
F Forgiveness of C → C Forgiveness of F	.047	.086	.032
Empathy → C Forgiveness of M	.587	.113	.272***
Empathy → C Forgiveness of F	.674	.107	.324***
Emotional Regulation → C Forgiveness of M	.313	.105	.155**
Emotional Regulation → C Forgiveness of F	.471	.099	.243***

Note. $X^2(14) = 34.90$, $p < .01$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 4

Decomposition of Effects on Adolescent Forgiveness of Mother (and Father) (N = 334)

Source	*Direct*	*Indirect*	*Total*
M-C Connectedness (MR)	.121 (.071)	.042 (.026)	.163 (.096)
F-C Connectedness (FR)	.077 (.043)	.010 (.043)	.087 (.085)
M-C Warmth (OR)	.016 (.029)	.061 (.053)	.077 (.082)
F-C Warmth (OR)	.143 (.083)	-.014 (.001)	.129 (.084)
M Forgiveness of F (FR)	.079 (-.036)	.032 (.049)	.111 (.013)
F Forgiveness of M (MR)	.078 (.144)	.023 (.037)	.100 (.181)
M Forgiveness of C (MR)	.115 (.024)	-	.115 (.024)
F Forgiveness of C (FR)	-.057 (.032)	-	-.057 (.032)
Empathy (CR)	.272 (.324)	-	.272 (.324)
Emotional Regulation (CR)	.155 (.243)	-	.155 (.243)

Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR= observational report, CR = child-report.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

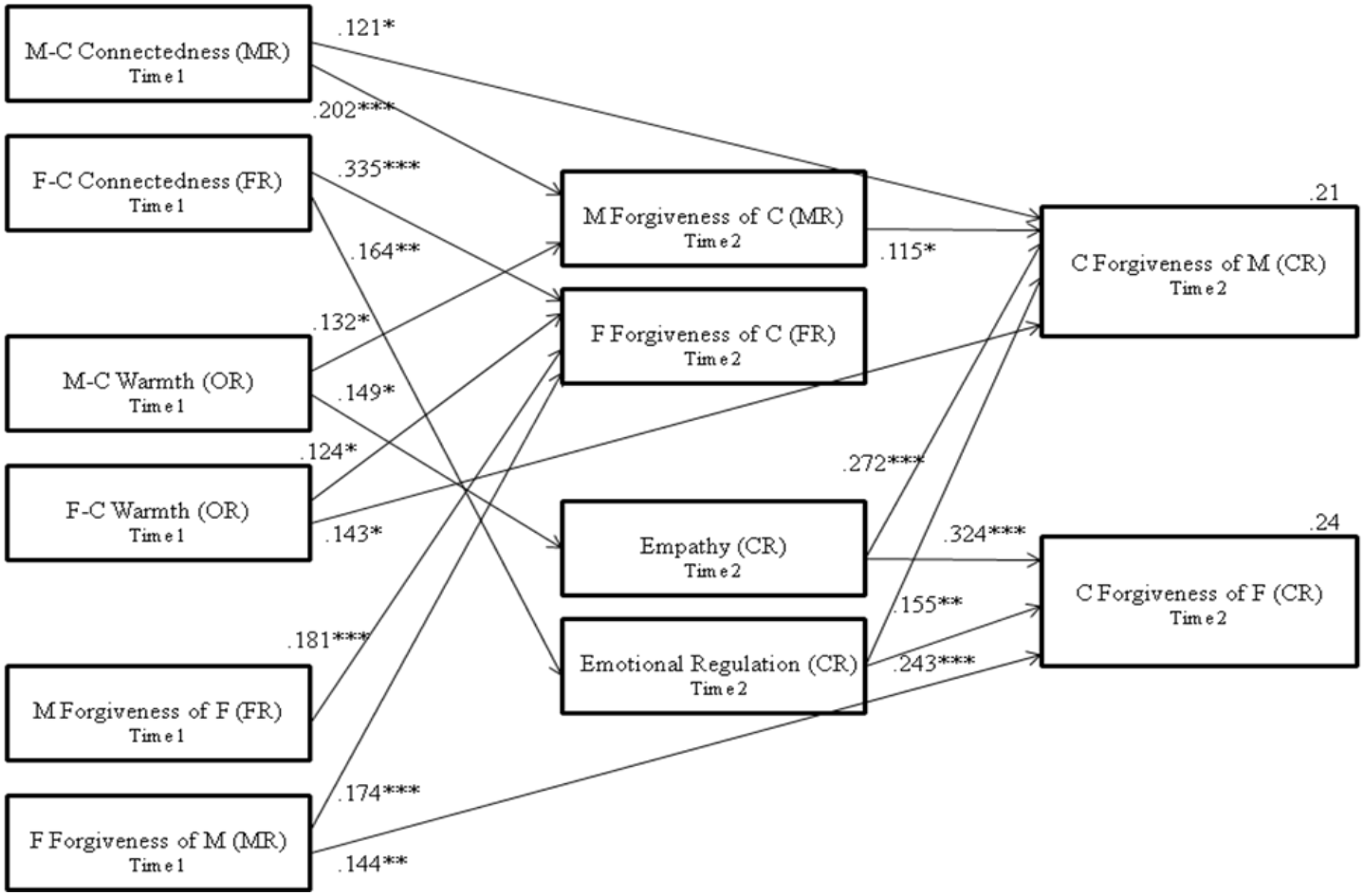

Figure 1. Parent Forgiveness of Child, Empathy, and Emotional Regulation as Mediators Between Mother- and Father-Child Relationship Quality and Marital Forgiveness on Adolescent Forgiveness of Mothers and Fathers. (N = 334)
Omitted from the figure are non-significant paths and endogenous error correlations.
Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR = observational report, CR = child-report;
$X^2(14) = 34.90$, $p < .01$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07;
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Appendix B

Relational and Social-Cognitive Influences on

Early Adolescents' Forgiveness of Parents

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Abstract

The current study examined the direct influences of the quality of mother- and father-child relationships (parent and observed reports) and modeled marital forgiveness on early adolescents' forgiveness toward both mothers and fathers; as well as the mediating role of parent forgiveness of the child and adolescent social-cognitive skills (empathy and emotional regulation). Mother, father, and child self-reported questionnaires and in-home observational data were taken from Time 1 and Time 3 (two years later) of the [project name masked for blind review], and included reports from 334 two-parent families with an early adolescent child (*M* age of child at Time 1 = 11.24). The quality of the mother-child relationship was found to directly and indirectly influence adolescents' level of forgiveness toward parents. Further, salient direct correlates of adolescent forgiveness were the adolescent child's own social-cognitive skills (i.e., empathy and emotional regulation). The relevance of modeling for forgiveness research, unique contributions of mothers and fathers, differences by reporter, developmental aspects of forgiveness, and the importance of studying forgiveness within the parent-child relationship are discussed.

Relational and Social-Cognitive Influences on Early Adolescents' Forgiveness of Parents

The process of forgiveness may be defined as the ability to treat an offender with love and beneficence, willfully abandoning the resentment and pain from an offense (see Klatt & Enright, 2009; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). In this intra- and inter-individual process, the offended seeks to regulate personal emotions and thoughts and respond positively toward the offender (Rye & Pargament, 2002; Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard, & Mullet, 2003). Although a complex construct in the empirical realm, forgiveness has been distinguished from similar constructs such as denial (being unwilling to perceive the offense), forgetting (removing the awareness of the offense), condoning (removing the offense and the need for forgiveness), and reconciliation (restoring the relationship regardless of forgiveness; Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Fow, 1996; Kachadourian, Fincham, & Davila, 2004; Sastre et al., 2003). The ability to forgive another and move from negative to positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is indeed a difficult process to not only accomplish, but also to study empirically. However, it does bring individual benefits ranging from cognitive to emotional to physiological (see Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001), as well as relational benefits such as restored relational harmony and healed emotional wounds (see McCullough & Worthington, 1994; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2003). Despite the complicated nature of forgiveness, most researchers agree that the primary influencing factors are cognitive, affective, and situational.

Relational context may also play a role in people's decisions to forgive, as closer relationships bring greater hurt from transgressions and more motivation to work to maintain the relationship (see Gold & Davis, 2005; McCullough et al., 1998). Close relationships will inherently include a shared history and emotional bonds that influence forgiving above and

beyond a tendency to forgive in other situations (Kachadourian et al., 2004). The majority of research testing these theories of interpersonal forgiveness has been done with dating and married couples (Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009; Kachadourian et al., 2004). However, the extant literature on forgiveness within close adult relationships may not be sufficient in understanding other types of relationships, particularly within other family relationships. Indeed, research suggests that forgiveness does function differently in marital dyads than in parent-child dyads (Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005). To date, few studies have examined forgiveness within the parent-child relationship (see Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003) during adolescence (see Klatt & Enright, 2009), a time of increased parent-child conflict (Sartor & Youniss, 2002) wherein forgiveness may be particularly poignant. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine what factors may influence adolescents' disposition to forgive within the parent-child relationship. Specifically, this two-year longitudinal study examined how both the mother- and father-child relationships, as well as marital forgiveness, influenced the development of adolescent forgiveness, and which parental modeling and adolescent social-cognitive skills acted as mediators between these variables.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality As a Predictor of Adolescent Forgiveness

Studies on close adult relationships have indicated that the quality of the relationship is integral in determining forgiveness. For example, higher levels of couple attachment and commitment have been directly related to greater forgiveness within the relationship (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Kachadourian et al., 2004), and forgiveness occurs more readily in satisfactory, committed relationships (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998). However, only one study has explored the link between closeness and forgiveness in parent-child dyads (Paleari et al., 2003), despite the call for researchers to examine

findings from the adult relationship literature with children (Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, & Boyatsis, 2005). While a small direct effect from parent-child relationship quality to child forgiveness was acknowledged in Paleari et al.'s study, results clearly pointed to a significant indirect effect of relational closeness through the child's social-cognitive traits. In order to better understand how parent-child relationship quality influences adolescent forgiveness, the current study will examine the direct longitudinal effects of relationship quality on adolescent forgiveness as well as indirect paths through modeling and social-cognitive mediators.

Parental Modeling

Just as children learn behaviors such as emotional regulation and aggression by observing their parents (Conger, Neppl, Kim, & Scaramella, 2003; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007), parental modeling of forgiveness within the marriage and parent-child relationship may influence adolescent forgiveness. Previous work has indicated that parents and children have similar conceptualizations and levels of forgiveness (Mullet , Girard, & Bakhshi, 2004; Subkoviak et al., 1995). In addition, Maio and colleagues (2008) demonstrated how parents' forgiveness of each other led to greater perceptions of being forgiven by the child one year later. While current research has supported the idea that forgiveness in parents is passed on to children through modeling, little research has focused on forgiveness within the parent-child dyad specifically, or examined both parent forgiveness of spouse and child as indicators of child-reported forgiveness. Thus, this study will look at both types of modeled forgiveness as direct predictors of child forgiveness.

Marital forgiveness. As marital forgiveness exists outside the parent-child dyad specifically, parents' forgiveness of their spouse was examined at the same time-point (Time 1) as quality of the parent-child relationship, with indirect paths through adolescents' social-

cognitive skills and parent forgiveness of the child. Given research suggesting that modeling is critical for children to learn proper expression of anger and emotion in order to forgive (Murray, 2002), it is expected that marital forgiveness will influence the development of adolescent social-cognitive skills over time, which in turn will be positively related to adolescents' forgiveness of their parents. Also, given research indicating that stable personal characteristics account for a significant percent of variance in people's willingness to forgive others (McCullough and Hoyt, 2002) and that positive family functioning in one dyad tends to resonate into positive functioning in other family dyads (Bowen, 1978), those who are more forgiving of their spouse are expected to be more forgiving of their children as well.

Parents' forgiveness of the child. While parental forgiveness of the child appears to influence the adolescent child's development of forgiveness, current research has yet to consider how the quality of the parent-child relationship influences these processes. Within the parent-child dyad, closeness may facilitate a greater willingness of parents to forgive their child of transgressions. The child, after seeing and experiencing this forgiveness, may reciprocate by forgiving the parent. Given research classifying forgiveness as a prosocial behavior (McCullough et al., 1997) and research suggesting that children are more likely to emulate modeled behaviors from those with whom they have a close relationship (Bandura, 1986; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998), parental modeling of forgiveness may increase forgiveness in their children if the parent-child relationship is positive. Thus, the current study will examine the direct and mediating role of mother and father forgiveness of the child on subsequent adolescent forgiveness of each parent.

Social-Cognitive Mediators

In addition to modeling behaviors, parents may help promote forgiveness in their children by fostering, through a positive and close relationship, the acquisition of social-cognitive skills

required to forgive. According to the social-psychological framework presented by McCullough and colleagues (McCullough et al., 1998), relational variables (e.g., closeness) indirectly influence forgiveness in close relationships through social-cognitive traits (e.g., attributions, ruminations, empathic emotions). Despite the limited research on forgiveness within the parent-child relationship specifically, research on other close relationships has indicated that empathy and emotional regulation may be salient mediators explaining the link between relationship quality and forgiveness.

Empathy. Empathy, or the ability to experience the emotions or feelings of others (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007), has been shown to be the most salient mediator between close adult relationship quality and forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Malcolm & Greenburg, 2000). As explained by McCullough et al. (1997), empathy allows the victim to recognize the emotions such as distress, guilt, or loneliness experienced by the offender and motivates the victim to mend the estranged relationship through forgiveness. Research has also indicated that parents indirectly influence the development of prosocial behaviors through sympathy and empathy (see Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Hoffman, 2001). If forgiveness functions similarly to other prosocial behaviors, a close parent-child relationship may indirectly influence forgiveness through the promotion of social-cognitive skills such as empathy in the child.

Emotional regulation. In addition to empathy, adolescents' abilities to regulate emotions may also promote forgiveness. According to Rizkalla, Wertheim, and Hodgson (2008), forgiveness requires the ability to first be aware of personal emotions (e.g., emotional intelligence see Mayer & Salovey, 1997) and then to regulate, manage, and repair those emotions to accomplish goals (e.g., emotional regulation; see Thompson, 1994). Due to the intense emotional experiences characteristic of adolescence, and adolescents' newly emerging emotional

management skills (Silk, Steinberg, & Morris, 2003; Spear, 2000), adolescents are likely just beginning to learn forgiveness through empathic and affective avenues. In addition, research has indicated the importance of a close parent-child bond in the development of adolescents' emotional regulation abilities (Morris et al., 2007) , so the parent-child relationship likely indirectly influences forgiveness through adolescents' abilities to regulate emotions. The current study will be the first to include adolescent emotional regulation as a direct predictor and mediator of adolescent forgiveness.

Mother-Father Differences

Existing literature is inconsistent regarding differential influences on forgiveness as a function of the gender of the parent, thus, the present study will add significantly to the literature by analyzing differences within mother- and father-child dyads. For example, one study reported dyadic differences in forgiveness (Maio et al., 2008), but two studies by Hoyt et al. (2005) revealed mixed results on whether adolescent children differentiated forgiveness toward mothers and fathers. Despite the inconsistencies in forgiveness research, previous work on parenting has indicated that adolescents report different perceptions of their relationships with mothers and fathers and that mothers and fathers approach the parenting of adolescents differently (Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Thus, the current study will seek to determine how the mother- and father-child relationships differentially influence adolescent forgiveness.

Summary and Study Directions

Taken together, the understanding of how forgiveness operates within the parent-adolescent relationship is limited and inconsistent. Employing four reporters (mother, father, child, and in-home observations), this study will examine the direct and indirect influences of parent-child relationship quality and modeled forgiveness within the marital relationship on the

adolescent's subsequent forgiveness of each parent. These variables are expected to positively and longitudinally influence mediating variables of modeling (parent forgiveness of the child) as well as the social-cognitive skills of empathy and emotional regulation in the adolescent (Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Parent forgiveness of the child and adolescents' social-cognitive skills are then expected to be associated with adolescent forgiveness of mother and father. Direct effects of the parent-child relationship will also be tested, but it is difficult to make specific hypotheses given the dearth of research on this topic during adolescence (Paleari et al., 2003).

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were selected from the [project name masked for blind review], an ongoing, longitudinal study of inner family life involving families with a child between the ages of 10 and 12 at Time 1 (*M* age of child = 11.24, 49% female). Participants were randomly selected from a large northwestern city (for more information on the participants and procedures, see [author citation]). Each in-home family interview consisted of a one-hour video and a one-and-one-half-hour self-administered questionnaire for mother, father, and child at Time 1 and two years later at Time 3 (for parsimony, time points will be referred to as Time 1 and Time 2 for this study). The current study employed both observational and questionnaire data. Longitudinal retention of participating families was high (92%), with only 40 of 500 families not participating at Time 2.

This study consisted of a subset of 334 two-parent (mother and father) families from the original 500 family sample. Ninety-five percent of mothers and 93% of fathers reported being biological parents, 3% of mothers and 4% of fathers reported being adoptive parents, and 1% of mothers and 3% of fathers reported being step-parents. Seventy-six percent of families reported that all members of the family were European-American, 4% were all African American, 1% all

Asian, and 19% of families reported that family members were multi-ethnic. Four percent of families reported an income less than $25,000 per year, 20% between $25,000 and $50,000 per year, and 76% more than $50,000 per year. In terms of education, 68% of mothers and 70% of fathers reported having a bachelor's degree or higher.

Observational data. At Time 1, in-home observations of the mother- and father-child relationships were videotaped as each dyad completed 25-minute interaction tasks, following the protocol established by the Iowa State Coding Lab. After the interview, trained coders watched video tapes of each parent-child dyad and coded interactions using The Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scales (Melby et al., 1998). Coders were extensively trained and were required to reach a minimum of 80% inter-rater agreement on a coded task by certified coders at the Iowa Behavioral and Social Science Research Institute. Reliability coding was blindly assigned to a second coder on 25% of coded tasks.

Measures

Parent-child relationship quality. The quality of the parent-child relationship was assessed from two perspectives at Time 1: in-home video observations and parent-reported questionnaires. Two coded observational scales were used. Warmth/support measured the degree to which the focal (mother, father, or child) expressed care and support for the other during interaction; and the reciprocate warmth/support observation scale measured the degree to which the focal responded in like manner to the other's warm and supportive behaviors. Coders rated behaviors on a scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 9 (*mainly characteristic*). The four interaction scales for each dyad (observations of warmth/support and reciprocate warmth/support for parent and child) were combined into one composite scale indicative of the warmth in each relationship. Reliability (Cronbach's α) for these scales were .71 for the mother-child dyad and

.60 for the father-child dyad.

Mother and father self-reported connectedness to the child (quality of the parent-child relationship) at Time 1 were assessed using four items from the Social Connectedness Scale (Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001). Items were reworded to focus on the parent-child relationship and parents responded on a Likert scale from 1 (*disagree*) to 6 (*agree*). Higher scores on items such as "I am able to relate to my child" represented greater perceived connection between the parent and child. For the entire scale, reliability (Cronbach's α) was found to be .94 (Lee et al., 2001), and for this sample and condensed scale it was found to be .78 (mothers) and .83 (fathers).

Forgiveness. To measure parent-modeled forgiveness, parents responded to 12 questions proposed by McCullough et al. (1998). The 7-point Likert response categories ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Subscales were used to determine forgiveness within the marital dyad as well as forgiveness from parent to child. At Time 1, each parent responded to questions about their spouse such as, "He/she can give up the hurt and resentment toward me." Higher scores were indicative of greater perceived forgiveness from the spouse to the respondent. At Time 2, parents responded to the same questions about their child (e.g., "I can forgive him/her pretty easily"). Higher scores indicated greater forgiveness from parent to child. Previously, the reliability coefficient was found to be .88 (McCullough, et al, 1998). Reliability tests for this sample indicated a Cronbach's alpha of .92 (mother perception of forgiveness from spouse at Time 1), .89 (father perception of forgiveness from spouse at Time 1), .82 (mother-reported forgiveness of child at Time 2), and .83 (father-reported forgiveness of child at Time 2).

The adolescent's forgiveness of each parent was assessed at Time 2 using the same scale used to assess parental forgiveness, with adolescents responding to questions for mother and father separately, including, "I can forgive him/her pretty easily." Cronbach's alpha was .88 for

mothers and .87 for fathers. As expected with an adolescent reporting on the same construct for mother and father, forgiveness toward mother and father were highly correlated (.71).

Social-cognitive skills. Two measures of social-cognitive functioning were examined at Time 2. The child's *empathy* was assessed via self-reports using a 7-item measure (Davis, 1983). Respondents answered how much they agreed or disagreed with statements, such as, "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them," on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). After reverse coding negatively worded items, higher scores indicated greater empathy. Previous reliability for this measure was found to be .72 (Davis, 1983) and was .80 for this research sample.

The adolescent's *emotion regulation* abilities were also assessed at Time 2 using the self-report emotional regulation subscale of the Novak and Clayton (2001) self-regulation measure. Adolescents responded to how much they agreed with statements such as, "I have a hard time controlling my temper," and, "I get so frustrated I feel ready to explode," using a scale from 1 (*never true*) to 5 (*always true*). After reverse coding all five items, higher scores represented the child's ability to better regulate emotions. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .82.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Means and standard deviations for all variables are reported in Table 1. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated that no study variables significantly differed as a function of ethnicity. However, a MANOVA did indicate significant differences by child gender, Wilk's $\Lambda = .84$; $F(12, 252) = 4.14$, $p = .000$. As follow-up tests to the MANOVA, univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted (see Table 1). Girls reported higher levels of empathy, $F(1, 252) = 34.95$, $p = .000$, whereas boys reported higher levels of emotional

regulation , $F(1, 252) = 4.68$, $p = .031$. Compared to boys, girls also reported more forgiveness toward their fathers, $F(1, 252) = 5.20$, $p = .023$, and had higher mean scores of observed warmth in the mother-child relationship, $F(1, 252) = 5.79$, $p = .017$. Differences by child gender in all other study variables were not significant. T-tests revealed that mothers reported higher levels of connectedness, $M = 5.33$ vs. 5.11, $t = 3.70$, $p = .000$, and greater levels of observed warmth with the adolescent child at Time 1, $M = 3.02$ vs. 2.85, $t = 3.05$, $p = .002$, as well as higher levels of forgiveness toward the child at Time 2, $M = 6.33$ vs. 6.10, $t = 3.58$, $p = .000$, than did fathers. Fathers were perceived by mothers as having higher levels of forgiveness within the marital relationship, $M = 5.52$ vs. 5.24, $t = 3.09$, $p = .002$.

Correlations were conducted to determine the bivariate relations between all variables in the model (see Table 2). Indicators of the parent-child relationship were significantly correlated with one another, with the highest correlation being between the observations of each parent-child dyad, $r = .39$, $p < .01$. Perceptions of parental forgiveness within the marital dyad were also expectedly related, $r = .25$, $p < .01$, as well as mother and father self-reports of connectedness to the child and forgiveness toward the child, $r = .25$, $p < .01$; $r = .38$, $p < .01$. Nearly all study variables were significantly correlated with the outcome variables of adolescent forgiveness toward mother and father.

Model Analyses

Evaluation of the path model was conducted in AMOS 17.0 (Arbuckle, 2008). The initial evaluation began with a saturated model linking the six predictor variables (parent and observational reports of the quality of the relationship for each dyad and parent perceptions of spousal forgiveness at Time 1) to the four mediators (parent-reported forgiveness of the child and child-reported empathy and emotional regulation at Time 2), and finally to the two outcome

variables (adolescent forgiveness toward mother and father at Time 2). Parent forgiveness of the child and social-cognitive mediators were then linked to adolescent forgiveness. Theoretically relevant error terms were allowed to correlate, indicating that these variables were influenced by similar outside sources not accounted for within the model. Although error and latent variable covariances are not shown in Figure 1 for parsimony, parent reports of connectedness and observational reports of warmth in the mother-child relationship, $r = .13$, $p = .012$, and father-child relationship, $r = .12$, $p = .019$, were correlated with one another. Additionally, mother and father reports of connectedness, $r = .17$, $p = .002$, observational reports of warmth in each parent-child dyad, $r = .37$, $p = .000$, spouse reports of perceived forgiveness within the marital dyad, $r = .25$, $p = .000$, empathy and emotional regulation, $r = .05$, n.s., and adolescent forgiveness of mother and father, $r = .65$, $p = .000$, were correlated. The model was an acceptable fit for the data, with a comparative fit index (CFI) of .96 and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .07 ($\chi^2 = 34.90$, $p < .01$, $df = 14$). The model accounted for 21% of the variance in adolescent forgiveness toward mothers and 24% toward fathers. Figure 1 presents standardized coefficients and significance levels for all significant paths; Table 3 presents all direct, indirect, and total effects.

As seen in Figure 1, direct significant paths were as follows. Mother-reported connectedness to her adolescent child at Time 1 was directly related to her self-reported forgiveness of the child, $\beta = .20$, and to the adolescent's self-reported forgiveness of the mother at Time 2, $\beta = .12$. Father-reported connectedness to his adolescent child at Time 1 was directly related to his forgiveness of the child, $\beta = .34$, and to adolescents' emotional regulation at Time 2, $\beta = .16$. Observed warmth in each parent-child dyad was directly related to that same parent's forgiveness of the child at Time 2 (mother, $\beta = .13$; father, $\beta = .12$). Observed warmth in the

mother-child dyad was also directly related to adolescent empathy at Time 2, β = .15, while observed warmth of father and child was related to adolescent forgiveness of mother at Time 2, β = .14. Perceptions of marital forgiveness at Time 1 were both related to father-reported forgiveness of the child at Time 2 (mother forgive father, β = .18; father forgive mother, β = .17). The father's forgiveness of mother (as perceived by mother) was also directly related to the adolescent child's forgiveness of the father at Time 2, β = .14. Mother forgiveness of the child, β = .12, adolescent empathy, β = .27, and adolescent emotional regulation, β = .16, were also related to adolescent forgiveness of mother, while empathy, β = .32, and emotional regulation, β = .24, were related to forgiveness of father.

As seen in Table 3 (representing direct, indirect, and total effects for each variable in the analyses), empathy appears to have the largest total effect upon forgiveness toward mother, β = .27, and father, β = .32. For adolescent forgiveness toward mother, the quality of the mother-child relationship appears to have the next largest total effect, β = .16, followed closely by emotional regulation, β = .16. Emotional regulation, however, appears to be the second largest total effect, β = .24, for forgiveness toward father, followed by the quality of the mother-child relationship, β = .10.

In order to assess indirect, or mediation, effects, Sobel tests were conducted, which provided a direct test of simple mediation by comparing the strength of the indirect effect to the null hypothesis (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). These tests indicated that observed warmth in the mother-child relationship at Time 1 had a significant indirect link to adolescent forgiveness of both parents at Time 2 via empathy (child forgive mother, β = .04, Sobel = 2.18, p = .029; child forgive father, β = .05, Sobel = 2.24, p = .025) and that father-reported connectedness to the child at Time 1 had a significant indirect link to adolescent forgiveness of both parents via emotional

regulation (child forgive mother, β = .03, Sobel = 2.04, p = .041; child forgive father, β = .04, Sobel = 2.41, p = .016). The indirect paths from Time 1 mother-child relational predictors (connectedness, β = .02, Sobel = 1.83, n.s.; observed warmth, β = .02, Sobel = 1.53, n.s.) to adolescent forgiveness of the mother at Time 2 were insignificant.

Discussion

This study provides important insight into which factors influence adolescents' forgiveness of their mothers and fathers over time. Results from multiple reporters (father, mother, child, and observational reports) indicated that the quality of the mother-child relationship influenced adolescents' level of forgiveness toward mother and father directly, as well as indirectly through the child's own social-cognitive skills (i.e., empathy and emotional regulation). Furthermore, modeling hypotheses were partially supported and interesting differences in mother- and father-child relationships were noted.

Parent-Child Relationship Quality As a Predictor of Adolescent Forgiveness

Current researchers agree that the process and purpose of forgiveness are dependent upon the relational context in which they occur (see Maio et al., 2008; McCullough et al., 1997), although little work has examined the parent-child relationship as it relates to forgiveness. The current study adds to the existing literature by suggesting that forgiveness within the parent-child dyad may operate similarly to other dyadic relationships in that forgiveness is directly related to the quality of the relationship (see Kachadourian et al., 2004). However, the direct links from relational variables to adolescent forgiveness that were found were in contrast to the limited previous research examining forgiveness in the parent-child dyad, which found relatively few direct links (e.g. Paleari et al., 2003). The direct influence of the relationship on forgiveness may also be due to the particular aspects of the parent-child relationship that were tapped in the

current study. Indeed, Fincham (2000) theorized that it is not empirically justified to assume relationship quality functions the same in all relationships, and that more specific aspects of each relationship type ought to be examined. Connectedness to the child and observed warmth in dyadic interactions may be more strongly related to adolescent forgiveness than variables assessed in previous work, such as commitment, intimacy, trust, and positive relational affect (see Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Future work should also strive to disentangle the particular aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship that may facilitate greater forgiveness. Given the changing dynamics in the parent-child relationship during adolescence (Steinberg & Silk, 2002), warmth, autonomy granting, and communication may be particularly salient.

While the quality of the parent-child relationship appears to be directly relevant to adolescent forgiveness, the current study supported previous work indicating that relational variables are often manifest indirectly through more proximal social-cognitive traits (McCullough et al., 1998). As forgiveness is an internal process (Klatt & Enright, 2009), it is sensible that a close parent-child bond may be necessary, but not sufficient, to lead adolescents to forgive their parents. Rather, the current study suggests that the critical and proximal skills of empathy and emotional regulation must be present, and research has indicated that these are certainly fostered by a close parent-child relationship (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson 2007; Morris et al., 2007). Indeed, the primary difference in the findings from the current study and work on other close relationships lies in the hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship. As opposed to adult relationships, where social-cognitive skills are developed previous to the relationship, these skills are fostered in children, at least in part, within the context of the parent-child relationship (Bugental & Goodnow, 1998). Thus, a positive parent-child bond may lead not only to increased forgiveness within that particular relationship, but also

extend to the child's future relationships because they have acquired the necessary social-cognitive skills in the home. This may be particularly important during adolescence as children seek greater autonomy from parents and more companionship with peers (Buhrmester, 1996; Steinberg & Silk, 2002).

The current study also provided added insight from observed reports of relationship quality, whereas previous studies examining forgiveness within the parent-adolescent relationship only employed questionnaire data (Maio et al., 2008; Paleari et al., 2003). Both parent-reported questionnaires and observational data were significantly associated with parent forgiveness of the child two years later, dispeling the idea that these variables may only be related due to shared method variance. In addition, the observational perspective of the parent-child relationship in this study offers a more complete picture of reality by demonstrating multiple perspectives (Cook & Goldstein, 1993), and it captures important paths to child forgiveness of the parents that may have been overlooked in previous studies. For example, observed warmth in the mother-child dyad at Time 1 was significantly related to adolescent empathy at Time 2, which in turn was a salient predictor of child forgiveness toward both mother and father. Additionally, observed warmth in the father-child dyad was directly related to child forgiveness of the mother two years later. Clearly, while questionnaire data offers a helpful starting point, future work needs to continue to employ observational methods to capture different aspects of the mother- and father-child relationships.

Parental Modeling

The current study found partial support for the modeling hypotheses. Firstly, consistent with family systems theory (Bowen, 1978), marital forgiveness, by both mother and father, was related to father forgiveness of the child two years later. In this way, positive functioning in the

marital dyad was found to resonate, perhaps influencing positive functioning within the father-child dyad. This longitudinal association between parental forgiveness toward different targets is more striking considering that marital forgiveness was perceived and reported by the spouse and parent forgiveness of the child was self-reported. Fathers' marital forgiveness was also directly related to child forgiveness of the father, suggesting that fathers may play a unique role in modeling forgiveness for their children. Additionally, mothers' forgiveness of the child was significantly related to adolescents' returned forgiveness. These findings indicate that both levels of modeling (marital and parent-to-child) may be salient to adolescent forgiveness of parents, suggesting that children may benefit from seeing parents forgive one another as well as from personally experiencing forgiveness from their parents.

However, despite these findings, modeling variables were not as strongly related to adolescent forgiveness as hypothesized, thus raising the question of whether modeling is truly the operative function, as others have claimed (Maio et al., 2008; Murray, 2002). Most of the work suggesting modeling as a determinant of forgiveness has not empirically tested the salience of modeling variables on subsequent child forgiveness or included relationship and social-cognitive indicators in the analysis. By examining modeled forgiveness with relationship and social-cognitive variables, the current study suggests that perhaps modeling is not as significant a determinant as previously thought and that other relationship and personal variables may be more relevant. Furthermore, modeling, as described in the literature, occurs when children model behaviors they see others do (Eisenberg & Valiente, 2002), yet forgiveness has been described as a slow process, which is difficult to observe in others (Mullet et al., 2004). Perhaps adolescents do not specifically recognize forgiveness in their parents' relationship, just the general positive quality of their relationship promoted by such forgiveness. Future work should examine the

influence of the quality of the marital relationship on adolescent forgiveness to determine if children are positively affected by a general positive atmosphere and if these effects nullify modeling effects. Also, Murray (2002) posited that modeled forgiveness taught the skills necessary to forgive, but the current model indicated no significant paths from parent-modeled forgiveness of each other to adolescent social-cognitive skills two years later. This may be a function of a two-year longitudinal design with parent and child reports, but future work does need to address the mechanisms of the modeling influences.

Additionally, only mother forgiveness of the child and mother relationship variables (vs. father) were significantly associated with adolescent forgiveness of mother, suggesting that the influence of modeled forgiveness from the mother may be more a function of relationship quality rather than modeling. Interestingly, father forgiveness of the mother was related to adolescent forgiveness of the father. This may also be an indication of the close bond between mother and child. Perhaps adolescents, who feel closely bonded to their mothers, are more willing to forgive those who forgive their mothers. This may demonstrate a more indirect influence of the mother-child relationship on adolescent forgiveness. Future work needs to carefully examine relationship and modeling variables together to help determine if and how modeling makes a unique contribution to adolescent forgiveness of parents.

Social-Cognitive Mediators

Social-cognitive skills were found to be particularly salient predictors of adolescents' forgiveness of both mother and father, supporting previous research highlighting the importance of these skills in interpersonal forgiving (McCullough et al., 1998). As an internal process, it is reasonable that the most salient precursors to forgiveness would be those that occur immediately prior to decision and action. Other studies have hailed the importance of empathy in forgiveness

(see Fincham, 2000; McCullough et al., 1997; Denham et al., 2005), which the current findings support, but, as illuminated by the current study, self-regulation plays a critical role for adolescents as well. As explained by Fincham (2000), the passage of time is not enough to constitute true forgiveness, but rather the individual must choose to let go of resentment and let positive emotions toward the offender take center stage. Additionally, forgiveness is not immediately achieved, but rather comes through a process involving concerted effort on behalf of the forgiver (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Fincham, 2000). The ability to maintain the desire and work required to achieve true forgiveness of others will be aided if the individual is competent at regulating changes in emotions. Future work should include examination of emotional regulation as an important determinant of forgiveness during adolescence.

Gender of Parent

Given the relative dearth of research on forgiveness within the parent-child relationship, this study benefitted from the inclusion of both mothers and fathers. The findings illustrate that, even in early adolescence, relational and dispositional factors are already functioning to influence the development of forgiveness toward mother and father, and that these influences persist over a two-year span. Thus, findings suggest that mothers and fathers are differentially influencing social-cognitive development in their adolescent children (mother was related to empathy, while father was related to self-regulation; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009; Padilla-Walker & Christensen, in press), and mothers and fathers may play important and unique roles in fostering forgiveness within the adolescent relationship.

While both mothers and fathers are important for the development of forgiveness, the current model suggests that the mother-child relationship plays a central role in the adolescent forgiving both mother and father. As seen in Figure 1, social-cognitive skills are notably related

to adolescent forgiveness toward both parents, but all other paths related to adolescent forgiveness encompass some aspect of the mother-child relationship. Previous work has indicated that adolescent motivations for forgiving each parent differ (Hoyt et al., 2005)—this study suggests that the personal relationship with the mother may be most critical for forgiveness of the mother, while social-cognitive skills and the father's forgiveness of mother may be most salient for forgiving the father. Future work should continue to examine both mother- and father-adolescent relationships to determine how mothers and fathers matter uniquely for the development of forgiveness, as well as if adolescents truly forgive each parent differently and why.

Limitations

Although the current study benefitted from the strength of a longitudinal design, as well as the inclusion of multiple reporters, including observational methods, it was not without limitations. Primarily, the current study only examined two-parent families, but adolescent forgiveness may develop and function differently in single-parent households. Further, this study employed a short and general assessment of forgiveness that may not accurately capture the complexity of forgiveness within these relationships. However, one-item forgiveness measures have been previously found to correlate highly with full and complex forgiveness measures (Subkoviak et al., 1995), and responses to the single item, "I forgive my partner," have been closely aligned with behavioral tendencies (Finkel et al., 2002).

Conclusions

Despite these limitations, the two-year longitudinal design of the current study offers important insight into which relational and dispositional factors influence adolescents' forgiveness of their mothers and fathers over time. Similar to work on adult relationships, this

study highlights the importance of social-cognitive skills in forgiveness within the parent-child dyad (McCullough et al., 1998) but is the first to demonstrate the salience of emotional regulation for adolescent forgiveness. In addition, the current study emphasizes the direct, as well as indirect, influence of the parent-child relationship, as assessed by multiple reporters. Further, results highlight the unique roles of mothers and fathers in socializing adolescent forgiveness and suggest that adolescents may be motivated to forgive each parent for different reasons. These findings are particularly salient in consideration of the sensitive developmental time frame of early adolescence. Researchers have also noted that during this critical time, adolescents need an atmosphere that consistently challenges them to use forgiveness to resolve hurts (Enright et al., 1989). As conflict and change increase in parent-adolescent relationships (Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Steinberg, 2001), these parent-child relationships may be the optimal place for adolescents to learn what forgiveness means and how to use the skills needed to forgive. Thus, it is critical to continue to examine how parents socialize and influence the development of forgiveness in their adolescent children.

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Table 1

Mean Differences in Study Variables as a Function of Gender of Child (N = 334)

	Total Sample	Males	Females	
Variable:	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	F-value
M-C Connectedness (MR)	5.33 (.78)	5.30 (.71)	5.36 (.85)	.380
F-C Connectedness (FR)	5.11 (.89)	5.05 (.89)	5.18 (.88)	1.54
M-C Warmth (OR)	3.03 (.86)	2.90 (.71)	3.15 (.98)	5.79*
F-C Warmth (OR)	2.85 (.79)	2.76 (.72)	2.94 (.85)	3.79
M Forgiveness of F (FR)	5.28 (1.30)	5.23 (1.30)	5.32 (1.31)	.316
F Forgiveness of M (MR)	5.51 (1.36)	5.42 (1.38)	5.60 (1.33)	1.27
M Forgiveness of C (MR)	6.33 (.76)	6.30 (.79)	6.37 (.73)	.694
F Forgiveness of C (FR)	6.09 (.91)	6.01 (.93)	6.18 (.90)	2.28
Empathy (CR)	3.71 (.63)	3.50 (.60)	3.93 (.57)	34.95***
Emotional Regulation (CR)	3.97 (.67)	4.06 (.63)	3.88 (.70)	4.68*
C Forgiveness of M (CR)	5.43 (1.31)	5.28 (1.30)	5.57 (1.32)	3.25
C Forgiveness of F (CR)	5.49 (1.23)	5.32 (1.17)	5.66 (1.26)	5.20*

Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR= observational report, CR = child-report.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Correlations Between all Study Variables (N = 334)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. M-C Connectedness (MR)	-											
2. F-C Connectedness (FR)	.20*	-										
3. M-C Warmth (OR)	.19**	.17**	-									
4. F-C Warmth (OR)	.11*	.19**	.39**	-								
5. M Forgiveness of F (FR)	.10	.19**	.01	.02	-							
6. F Forgiveness of M (MR)	.10	.06	-.01	-.09	.25**	-						
7. M Forgiveness of C (MR)	.25**	.18**	.16**	.02	.16**	.14*	-					
8. F Forgiveness of C (FR)	.10	.38**	.05	.15*	.28**	.22**	.18**	-				
9. Empathy (CR)	.11	.03	.16**	.07	.12*	.09	.14*	.08	-			
10. Emotional regulation (CR)	.03	.17**	.02	.00	.09	.06	.05	.10	.06	-		
11. C Forgiveness of M (CR)	.23**	.18**	.17**	.18**	.18**	.14*	.22**	.11	.34**	.20**	-	
12. C Forgiveness of F (CR)	.15**	.14*	.14*	.13*	.09	.20**	.14*	.13*	.38**	.28**	.71**	-

Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR = observational report, CR = child-report.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Table 3

Decomposition of Effects on Adolescent Forgiveness of Mother (and Father) (N = 334)

Source	*Direct*	*Indirect*	*Total*
M-C Connectedness (MR)	.12 (.07)	.04 (.03)	.16 (.10)
F-C Connectedness (FR)	.08 (.04)	.01 (.04)	.09 (.09)
M-C Warmth (OR)	.02 (.03)	.06 (.05)	.08 (.08)
F-C Warmth (OR)	.14 (.08)	-.01 (.00)	.13 (.08)
M Forgiveness of F (FR)	.08 (-.04)	.03 (.05)	.11 (.01)
F Forgiveness of M (MR)	.08 (.14)	.02 (.04)	.10 (.18)
M Forgiveness of C (MR)	.12 (.02)	-	.12 (.02)
F Forgiveness of C (FR)	-.06 (.03)	-	-.06 (.03)
Empathy (CR)	.27 (.32)	-	.27 (.32)
Emotional Regulation (CR)	.16 (.24)	-	.16 (.24)

Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR= observational report, CR = child-report.

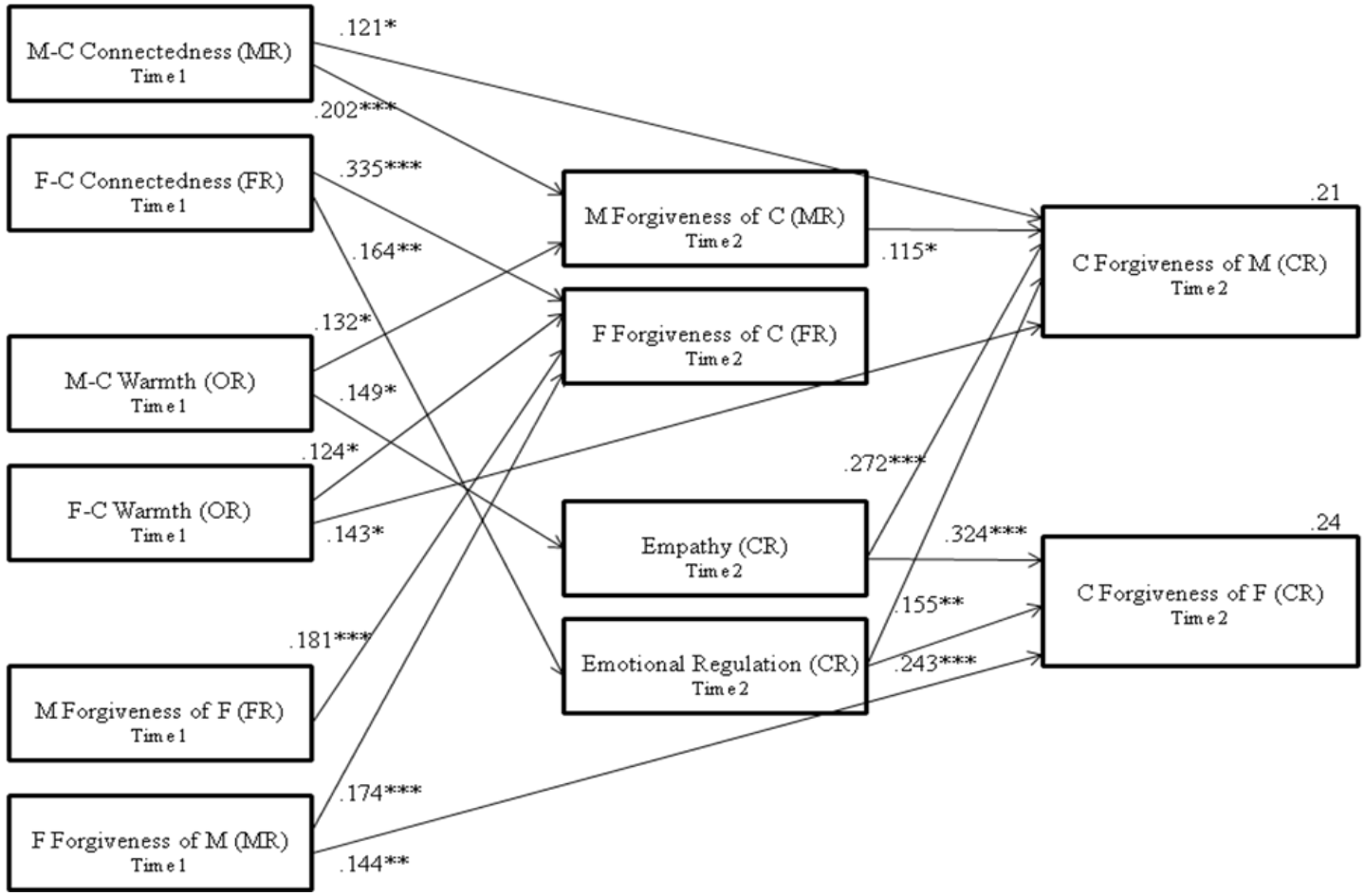

Figure 1. Parent Forgiveness of Child, Empathy, and Emotional Regulation as Mediators Between Mother- and Father-Child Relationship Quality and Marital Forgiveness on Adolescent Forgiveness of Mothers and Fathers. (N = 334)
Omitted from the figure are non-significant paths and endogenous error correlations.
Note. MR = mother report, FR = father report, OR = observational report, CR = child-report;
$X^2(14) = 34.90$, $p < .01$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07;
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.