

WHAT I KNOW IS ENOUGH: EXPLORING FORGIVENESS AND COGNITIVE DYNAMICS ON THE TRANSGRESSOR'S TRAITS IN INTERPERSONAL TRANSGRESSION

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Abstract

Forgiving a transgressor is almost always a result of an interaction between cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. While each component is equally important in deciding to forgive, it appears that it has various underlying forces that require to be examined empirically - most especially, the victim has been provided loads of cognitive information. Thus, using the victim's perspectives, this study conceptualizes the impact of the transgressor's traits (e.g., prototypical and non-prototypical) in relation to the degree of transgression and its priming sequence. Study 1 with 43 college students answered a thought listing survey concerning transgressor's traits when they consider forgiveness. Study 2 involved 100 college students to further examine these traits through prototypicality rating approach. Using factor analysis, traits found in study 1 were consistent with the trait factor loadings. Study 3 randomly assigned 167 undergraduate students to several experimental conditions for validation of interaction and independent effects in forgiveness tendencies. The results show the activation of prototypic traits with a higher degree of offense might be used against the transgressor and lowering the chance of being forgiven. The traits imply that forgiveness is a result of a cognitive processing consistent with the principal of automaticity than a social process.

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Introduction

The experience of forgiving a transgressor is almost always described as a result of an interaction between cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Forgiveness takes place with the changes in the way the victim perceive and interpret the transgression, a shift in the emotional tone from negative to a more neutral or positive affective experience, and the possible act of fixing the relationship. This tripartite model of forgiveness has been closely examined by several studies. While these three components are equally important in making a decision to forgive, they also have their respective issues to address before the finally put them together in one model. Each component appears to have separate dynamics that require to be investigated empirically. This research will only focus in understanding the cognitive process of forgiveness. Particularly, this will provide alternative explanations on Karremans and Aarts' (2007) hypothesis on the automaticity of forgiveness.

When a transgression is experienced, the victim is actually provided loads of cognitive information that are either conscious (Anderson, 2007; Glaeser, 2008) or nonconsciously processed. These pieces of information can be vital in making a decision to forgive the transgressor. In general categories, these pieces of information can be classified as contextual and dispositional factors (Koutsos, Wertheim, & Kornblum, 2008). Contextual factors include the degree of the offense or hurt felt from the transgression (Cioni, 2006; Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005; Merolla & Zhang, 2011) and the description of pre-offense relationship (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007; Paz, Neto, & Mullet, 2008; Tsang, 2006) between the victim and the transgressor. The dispositional factors, on the other hand, include not only the dispositional trait to forgive (*see* Hill, Allemand, & Burrow, 2010; Hill & Allemand, 2012) the transgressor but as well as characteristics and behaviors of the transgressor before and after to the act of wrong doing (Kelley & Waldron, 2005). While these factors have been very well explored in the psychological literature, there are areas that were not given much attention in the existing empirical investigation. For example, studies of Allemand and his colleagues (Allemand, Job, Christen, & Keller, 2008; Hill & Allemand, 2010, 2012) aimed to understand the victim

or the transgressed and their disposition to forgive as the vehicle toward fixing a damaged relationship. However, transgressor's forgivability in relation his/her personality traits or behavior that could be used also as a basis in forgiving has gained a very minimal amount of attention among scholars (Howell, Dopko, Turowski, & Buro, 2011). Largely, studies have been focusing on the intention of the transgressor in committing the wrong doing in relation to being forgivable (Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Mccullough, 2001) and the behavior embedded in describing the relationship as good or bad (Carr & Wang, 2012).

Prototypic traits and forgiveness

In personality studies, prototypical ratings has been used to categorized personality characteristics and traits (Buss & Craik, 1983). It identifies how a set of personality traits can be clustered together to infer similarities. While those traits found in the boundaries of the category are fuzzy while those traits that are considered prototypical can be recognized easily. The use of prototypical traits as a basis of categorizing people is similar to the social psychological concept of *stereotyping* (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981). Both the prototypical and stereotypical beliefs are used to set expectations to how people are supposed to behave. In the case of prototypical perspective, it is viewed as a personality characteristic of the individual while stereotyping is a product of social categorization of individuals. Hence, presentation of prototypical traits can be used as mental shortcut in passing judgment towards other people.

In forgiveness literature, there are attributes associated with transgressors that significantly contribute to a victim's decision to forgive. Many of these are associated with behaviors showed after the transgression has been done. Most especially among these behaviors is the tendency of the transgressor to express an apology after the transgression (Takaku, 2001). The expression of apology is examined by the victim in terms of the transgressor's sincerity to express it and the ability to confess one's wrong doing (Kelley & Waldron, 2005). In this scenario, the victim sets a behavioral expectation from the transgressor who is apologizing. When there is a misfit between the transgressor's repentance behavior and victim's expectations, it will lead to a lower chance of granting forgiveness (Santelli, Struthers, & Eaton, 2009). This is the reason why, according to them, apologies may not necessarily the key to forgiveness. The frame of mind of the victim with regard the transgressor's behavior plays a vital element in achieving forgiveness. There are also personality characteristics

associated with people who have the tendency to offer apologies (Howell et al., 2011). These personality characteristics are mostly associated with social desirable characteristics such as well-being, acceptance, agreeableness, compassion, positive emotion, moral foundation, and forgiveness-seeking behavior. In the four fold study of Howell et al., they concluded that apology is an established domain of forgiveness. Another consistent transgressor's characteristic associated with forgiveness is the intentionality to do the transgression (Young & Saxe, 2009). Aside from the dynamics of apologies, Struthers, Eaton, Shirvani, Georghiou, and Edell, (2008) accounted other characteristics of the transgressors such as responsibility, motivation to reconcile and repentance as behaviors relevant to forgiveness.

Previous studies have showed that victims have a frame of mind towards the transgressor and the behaviors he or she is showing. Although apology and intentionality have shown consistent results and have been investigated almost thoroughly, these are not personality characteristics of transgressors and instead products of confounded personality characteristics. This study breaks down these behaviors into smaller personality traits that may be associated as prototypical characteristics of the transgressor's forgivability. Similar to the process of stereotyping, when these traits are evident, the victim can use them to automatically evaluate the transgression that may be biased towards the prototypical trait. This partially supports the claim of Karremans & Aarts (2007) on the automaticity of forgiveness. While they argued on the relationship of the transgressor and the victim as the reason for the automaticity of forgiveness, this paper argues on the prototypicality traits of the transgressor as the basis for the automaticity of forgiveness.

Degree of offense and forgiveness

In terms of contextual factors, it has been consistently reported that those transgressors who have positive relationships with the victims prior to the transgression may be granted of forgiveness easily (Karremans & Van Lange, 2005; Takaku, 2001). This is especially highlighted among collectivistic cultures (Ho & Fung, 2011). More specifically, there seem to have a clear understanding about the positive impact of closeness of the transgressor to the victim in being forgiven (Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, & Witvliet, 2008; Fincham & Paleari, 2002; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). In fact, Karremans and Aarts (2007) and Rungduin and colleagues (2018) have proven the automaticity of forgiveness

responses when factoring in the level of relationship or closeness with the transgressor. They further explain that forgiveness can be cognitively effortless especially when too much information are being processed (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Having said that, relationship appears to be constantly nested within the process of forgiveness. While there is a continuous assumption that harm severity or degree of offense plays an important contextual factor in forgiveness (Marks, Trafimow, Busche, & Oates, 2013), there is a need to further examine its dynamics especially when it comes to forgiveness when interacting with other factors. In the meta-analysis of Fehr, Gelfand, and Nag (2010) with regard situational and dispositional correlates, they identified that at the cognitive level, harm severity serves as a measure of situational factors in forgiveness. It is not surprising therefore to learn that degree of the offense have been found to positively predict the tendency to forgive (Fincham, Jackson, & Beach, 2005; Marks et al., 2013; Merolla & Zhang, 2011). This study will use degree of offense to shed light on the dynamics of the prototypicality traits. Independently, the degree of offense can determine the propensity to forgive; however, when this is taken in the context of prototypical traits, which is conceived to prompt an automatic cognitive processing of transgression information, will take the same direction of effect, whether it is low or high in degree.

Cognitive processing and forgiveness

Forgiveness can be cognitive in nature (Maltby, Macaskill, & Gillett, 2007), the decision to forgive is affected by the manner by which transgression information is being processed by the victim. The processing of information, however, is affected by the sequence of information presented - this is referred to as serial position (Anderson, 1973). When serial position is extended in a more social cognitive aspect, it becomes serial judgment (Schlottmann & Anderson, 1995) and semantic priming (Duscherer & Holender, 2005). In this discussion, it is also used interchangeably with a priming sequence. These generally refers to the position of a target information in a serial position, there are two possibilities as bases of the person in making judgment - the information that comes first (primacy) or the one that comes later (recency). According to Anderson (1973), primacy is relevant in 'crystalizing the judgment' while recency may be influential as they stay 'fresher' in the memory. Both appear to have different mechanisms in terms of their effect in impression formation (Anderson & Barrios, 1961; Dreben, Fiske, & Hastie, 1979). This primacy and recency effects

are also used to conserve mental costs by disregarding an initial information or allocating attention to recently experienced instances relative to the advantage provided by continually updating category representations (Duffy & Crawford, 2008). The relative costs and benefits of shifting a category representation to reflect new stimuli necessarily depend on several factors, including the cognitive demands of processing and the stability of the environment (Duffy & Crawford, 2008).

Recency and primacy priming cognitively activate specific information that is eventually used as a basis of making social judgment. In a sense, the manipulation of information, either primacy or recency, to affect the person's social judgment can be a variation of the priming technique, particularly a priming sequence. The sequence of information assumes to actually prime the individual in making a cognitive element salient prior to another unrelated assigned task. This method of understanding social cognition is considered one of the earliest methods and has been proven to an effective approach in investigating several social psychological phenomena (Cameron, Brown-Iannuzzi, & Payne, 2012). While this mental shortcut is used in a wide range of mental social operation, this is greatly affected by the individual's age. Hess, Mcgee, Woodburn, and Bolstad (1998) reported the susceptibility of adults in using priming biases than children. In addition, younger adults are more conscious about this priming-biased-judgment than adults. Consequently, they are more able to exhibit correct judgment than the older group. Following this line of thought, the use of mental shortcuts, such as primacy or recency can be more hardwired among older people. Forgas (2011) identified one's affect as a mediator in the primacy and recency effects during impression formation. He reported that positive mood can increase, and negative mood can eliminate the disproportionate influence of early information on impressions. Despite of his findings, Forgas (2011) has still found the relationship between affect and serial sequence effects inconclusive.

The activation of specific cognitive information can lead to several behavioral and affective consequences (Wyer, Calvini, Nash, & Miles, 2010). When negative stereotypes are primed, it increases the feeling of anxiety, threat sensitivity, hostility, and social avoidance. This illustrates the relationship between the priming activities and the behavioral and affective aspects. Thus, priming makes a dormant belief active and can prompt the person from acting on such when needed. Priming has been used also in forgiveness researches as a

method of recalling transgression experience (McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006). Participants were primed by the transgression experience by asking them to write down a painful experience. After such recall, a measure of the dependent variable is usually administered. The assumption is that these pieces of information that are top of the mind will implicitly or explicitly affect the judgment of the person in the assigned task afterwards.

The problem and hypothesis

Having an in-depth understanding of the victim's perspectives, this study conceptualizes the impact of the transgressor's traits (*e.g.*, prototypical and non-prototypical) in relation to the degree of transgression and its priming sequence. Thus, the present research has three major objectives, which are to be addressed in 3 phases of the study. This study aims to (a) collect free-responses with regard to characteristics considered by the respondents in forgiving a transgressor; (b) examine the traits generated from study 1 through prototypicality rating approach; (c) test the prototypic and non-prototypic traits against the degree of offense (high or low), and the sequence of information (trait-offense or offense-trait). This study hypothesizes the following:

1. Forgiveness prototypical traits of a transgressor is more likely to have a recency effect (offense-trait sequence) which will lead to increase the tendency of the victim to forgive whether the degree of the offense is either high or low.
2. Forgiveness non-prototypical traits of the transgressor is more likely to have a recency effect (offense-trait sequence) which will lead to decrease the tendency to forgive whether the degree of the offense is either high or low.

In essence, this paper has been divided into 3 folds. Studies 1 and 2 focused on the recovery of the forgiveness traits (*e.g.*, prototypical and non-prototypical) while Study 3 conducted an experiment to test the above hypotheses.

Study 1

Study 1 intends to collect free-responses with regard to characteristics considered by the respondents in forgiving a transgressor. These characteristics were also contrasted to characteristics that hinder people from actually forgiving. This initially provides a list of prototypic traits and non-prototypic traits of

offenders that people are using in evaluating the transgression and deciding to forgive. Since these traits are based on the experiences and reflections of people, these traits can be an important piece in understanding how people actually forgive.

Method

Sample

The survey involved 43 sophomore undergraduate students from a higher educational institution in Manila, Philippines. Their age ranges from 17 to 19 ($m=18,23$; $SD=.342$). Male (46,51%) and female (53,35%) distributions are considered to be almost equal. Participants were recruited through voluntary participation.

Instrument

Free-response form. The study made use of a free-response form in generating a list of forgiveness prototypic and non-prototypic traits of the transgressors. The form asked the participants to recall transgression that they experienced for the last six months where they decided to forgive the transgressor. After which, the form was divided into two parts. The first part was a listing of 5 major characteristics or traits of the transgressor that helped them to forgive (prototypic traits list). The second part was a listing of five major characteristics or traits of the transgressor that, at one point, held them back from forgiving (non-prototypic traits list). Participants were given permission to use Filipino in their listing of traits. Participants were then asked to rank the traits in both listings in terms of their degree of relevance to their experience of forgiveness.

Procedure and analysis

Participants were oriented with regard the study and the extent of their participation through informed consent. Specifically, they were informed about the objectives of the study as well as their responses will be used in achieving those objectives.

The two listings of traits were encoded separately in order to identify the prototypic and non-prototypic traits. Traits that were listed in Filipino were examined and translated through validation of experts in Filipino. Traits were merged based on their root words (*e.g.*, open-minded & open-mindedness) as

well as on their essence (*e.g.*, good listener & good communicator). The merged traits were content validated by another expert. An average ranking was obtained for each trait to measure the weight of the traits. The traits that found only once and cannot be mixed with any other traits were excluded in the final list of traits (*e.g.*, prototypic and non-prototypic).

Results

As mentioned, the prototypic and non-prototypic traits lists were analyzed separately. Tables 1 and 2 show the lists of prototypic and non-prototypic traits that are considered essential in forgiving a transgressor and those that hinder the experience of forgiveness, respectively. These traits were ranked based on the average ranking of the participants. It is worthy to mention that while rankings may indicate the relevance of these traits to the forgiveness process, their frequencies are sometimes not consistent with the weight given by the participants. This is especially evident in the prototypic traits listing. In the case of trait *loving*, it was listed by 15 individuals while it ranked 12 out of the 28 identified prototypic traits. The trait *caring* also has the same condition where it ranked 16 but had a frequency of 12. This is contrast to the trait *honest*, which ranked first but was only observed twice. Taking into account both the frequency and the ranking, it appears that trait *sincerity* has both higher ranking and considerable number of occurrence.

The non-prototypical traits list, on the other hand, is relatively consistent in terms of the number of occurrence of the traits along with their mean rankings. Taking into consideration both of these, the trait *prideful* illustrates a characteristic that can strongly defer the decision of the transgressed to grant forgiveness.

Table 1. Frequency and ranking of forgiveness prototypic traits of transgressors

Prototypic Trait	f	average ranking	rank	Prototypic Trait	f	average ranking	rank
Honest	2	1.5000	1	Open-minded	4	3.0000	15
Approachable	2	2.0000	2	Caring	12	3.3333	16
Sincere	7	2.1429	3	Friendly	3	3.3333	17
Accepting	3	2.3333	4	Brave	2	3.5000	18
Effortful	2	2.5000	5	Good communicator	2	3.5000	19
Kind	2	2.5000	6	Innocence	2	3.5000	20
Loyal	2	2.5000	7	Patient	6	3.5000	22

Table 1. Frequency and ranking of forgiveness prototypic traits of transgressors - *continued*

Prototypic Trait	f	average ranking	rank	Prototypic Trait	f	average ranking	rank
Generous	3	2.6667	8	Persevering	2	3.5000	23
Sweet	3	2.6667	9	Positive	2	3.5000	24
Humble	8	2.7500	10	Understanding	6	3.5000	25
Thoughtful	6	2.8333	11	Confident	2	4.0000	26
Loving	15	2.8667	12	Faithful	2	4.5000	27
Forgiving	5	3.0000	13	Trustworthy	2	5.0000	28
Funny	3	3.0000	14				

Table 2. Frequency and ranking of forgiveness non-prototypic traits of transgressors

Non-Prototype Traits	f	average ranking	rank	Non-Prototype Traits	f	average ranking	rank
Demanding	2	1.00	1	Self-centered	8	3.63	11
Prideful	13	1.72	2	Competitive	9	3.67	12
Emotionally Immature	9	2.22	3	Distant	2	4.00	13
Conceited	3	2.33	4	Impatient	5	4.00	14
Moody	10	2.43	5	Ignorant	2	4.00	15
Annoying	2	2.50	6	Stubborn	5	4.20	16
Insensitive	9	2.75	7	Hesitant	4	5.00	17
Dishonest	3	2.67	8	Coward	2	5.00	18
Close-minded	5	3.00	9	Arrogant	6	4.67	19
Shy	2	3.00	10				

Discussion

The main objective of Study 1 is to generate list of prototypic and non-prototypic traits of transgressor that either helps or prevents a transgressed person to forgive. However, aside from achieving this objective, the responses also revealed some significant observations with regard this trait listing. First, trait forgiveness was not salient characteristic, both in the criteria of frequency and ranking. A transgressor who has showed forgiveness behavior prior to the offense does not guarantee of also being forgiven when an offense is committed against another person. Second, there is that a greater number of prototypic traits that were generated than non-prototypic traits. This longer list of traits created an impression of more variability compared with non-prototypical trait listing. Individuals who experienced transgressions may start looking for a set of characteristics that will eventually assist them rationalize their choice to forgive. In contrast, a higher agreement is observed in the non-prototypic trait listing. This

indicates that people, in a collective sense, may readily spot traits that do not promote forgiveness or those that agitate the negative experiences of the transgressed. Lastly, those prototypic traits are characterized, as prosocial or desirable characteristics while the non-prototypic traits are antisocial or undesirable characteristics. Although this will be further examined in this paper, the results above informs that people who are showing desirable traits are most likely to be forgiven and those who show otherwise may take a longer, difficult, and dynamic process of seeking or to be granted forgiveness.

Although the characteristics above were generated directly from the experiences of people, it is an empirical question as to whether these can be recovered and validated when these traits will be subjected to prototypicality rating technique. Ultimately, it is important to examine the cognitive mechanism of these traits in the process of forgiveness.

Study 2

This study is conducted to further examine the traits generated from study 1 through prototypicality rating approach. This will further strengthen the standing difference between the traits that were identified to each list. Furthermore, this will confirm the clarity of loading of the traits on the non-prototypic and prototypic trait listing. If a specific trait is truly a prototypical of a person that can be forgiven, it should then be clearly distinguished from those that are considered non-prototypic. For example, if the trait *sincere* is found to be a prototypic trait in study 1 while *emotionally immature* as non-prototypic trait, they are expected to be highly endorsed as prototypic and non-prototypic traits, respectively.

Method

Sample

The sample was composed of 100 college students from a higher education institution in Manila who voluntarily participated in this study. They were recruited through their teachers in various general education courses. There is almost an equal distribution of male (49,1%) and female (50,1%). Their age ranges from 16 to 31 ($m=18,75$; $SD=2,53$). As part of the procedure, students were asked to sign an informed consent.

Instrument

Prototypicality rating form. A total of 46 forgiveness prototypical traits generated from Study 1 were arranged alphabetically. The respondents were asked to rate how much the traits are a prototype or exemplifies a person who can be forgiven. They rated the prototypicality of the traits using 9-point Likert scale with 1 indicating low prototypicality while 9 as high prototypicality.

Procedure

After the coordination with the general education teachers, testing was made available to those who are free to answer the questionnaire. The instrument was administered manually and was not allowed to be taken out from the testing venue. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and factor analysis.

Results and discussion

From the prototypicality rating of the participants, the trait *dishonest* seemed to be rated as the lowest while *understanding* was rated as the most prototypic characteristic of a transgressor that can be forgiven. While participants were asked to use 9-point Likert scale, they did not overly extend their ratings to the extremes. The highest prototypical and non-prototypical traits almost have the same distances from 1 and 9; also, those traits that came out prototypic and non-prototypic traits were recovered based on their ranking. The prototypic traits were all rated high as prototypic traits as well as the non-prototypic traits. This is specifically noted when the trait ratings between *innocence* and *confident* drop. These two traits set the demarcation line or the separation between the non-prototypic and the prototypic traits recognized in study 1. Consistently, the traits such as *emotionally* and *sincere* were perceived as non-prototypical and prototypic traits in forgiveness, respectively.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the combined forgiveness prototypic and non-prototypic traits

Traits	M	SD	Traits	M	SD
Understanding	7.600	1.822	Brave	6.473	1.999
Humble	7.564	1.525	Funny	6.309	1.990
Loving	7.546	1.451	Confident	5.818	1.827
Honest	7.436	1.761	Innocence	5.291	2.455
Loyal	7.382	1.616	Hesitant	5.218	2.462

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the combined forgiveness prototypic and non-prototypic traits - *continued*

Traits	M	SD	Traits	M	SD
Positive	7.382	1.639	Moody	4.891	2.370
Forgiving	7.346	2.179	Shy	4.873	2.253
Sincere	7.346	2.092	Competitive	4.727	2.468
Open-minded	7.327	1.846	Conceited	4.527	2.332
Faithful	7.273	1.810	Prideful	4.382	2.922
Trustworthy	7.255	1.838	Annoying	4.273	2.399
Accepting	7.200	1.768	Coward	4.164	2.283
Persevering	7.182	1.796	Self-centered	4.146	2.838
Patient	7.127	2.037	Stubborn	4.127	2.646
Thoughtful	7.073	1.698	Ignorant	4.109	2.455
Friendly	7.000	1.826	Close-minded	3.964	2.442
Effortful	6.964	2.009	Distant	3.946	2.256
Good communicator	6.927	1.562	Insensitive	3.855	2.571
Caring	6.891	1.595	Demanding	3.746	2.540
Generous	6.891	1.524	Impatient	3.673	2.487
Kind	6.891	1.618	Emotionally Immature	3.636	2.512
Approachable	6.855	2.068	Arrogant	3.600	2.431
Sweet	6.636	2.103	Dishonest	3.273	2.535

In order to determine the actual clustering of traits, a factor analysis was conducted. Results reveal two significant components that can be generated based on the eigen value. The loading of these components was consistent with the trait listing in the Study 1. Those traits that were identified as prototypic and non-prototypic earlier were also the traits that loaded together. Furthermore, those traits that were ranked high in Study 1 were the same traits that had high loading values such as traits *sincere*, *understanding*, and *accepting*. Although the loading in the non-prototypic is very similar to the loading in Study 1, the degree of variations is different from each other. Particularly, the difference in the endorsement of the traits was apparent. For example in Study 1, the trait *arrogant* had a low average ranking while in the factor analysis; this trait appeared to be highly endorsed. In contrast, the trait *prideful* was ranked high in the earlier report while in the factor analysis, it was one of the traits that were given low endorsement and consequently low factor loading compared to other non-prototypic traits. Also, there were traits that did not load in any of the two components. These traits are *open-minded*, *innocence*, *generous*, *funny*, and *brave*. In the prototypicality ratings, these are also the traits that appeared to be

found in the middle, between prototypic and non-prototypic trait lists. This assumes that these traits are difficult to be classified as either helpful or not in forgiving a transgressions.

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix of forgiveness prototypic and non-prototypic traits

	Component			Component	
	1	2		1	2
Close-minded	0.889		Faithful	0.714	
Impatient	0.881		Understanding	0.700	
Emotionally Immature	0.869		Approachable	0.699	
Arrogant	0.861		Accepting	0.699	
Demanding	0.838		Loving	0.686	
Dishonest	0.832		Patient	0.676	
Ignorant	0.819		Trustworthy	0.665	
Distant	0.788		Honest	0.638	
Coward	0.763		Friendly	0.627	
Annoying	0.726		Caring	0.625	
Competitive	0.723		Forgiving	0.603	
Moody	0.707		Humble	0.540	
Conceited	0.687		Effortful	0.498	
Hesitant	0.686		Good-communicator	0.496	
Stubborn	0.685		Positive	0.494	
Self-centered	0.681		Sweet	0.491	
Insensitive	0.646		Kind	0.475	
Prideful	0.592		Persevering	0.459	
Shy	0.575		Open-minded		
Confident	0.487		Innocence		
Thoughtful		0.759	Generous		
Sincere		0.747	Funny		
Loyal		0.716	Brave		

The results of the prototypicality ratings proved that certain traits could be associated in the process of forgiving. Likewise, there are traits that may hinder one from forgiving a transgressor. Summarizing the results of Studies 1 and 2, there are two premises that these studies have confirmed. First, those traits that are considered socially desirable are those that are associated with forgiveness. In other words, these are traits that also positively contribute in a person's decision to forgive. Based on the first two studies, these traits are readily available in people's mind as indicated in the consistent endorsement of these traits. Although there could be many factors that account for the person's decision to forgive, these studies have already initially mapped the kind of traits

that people may possibly be using as bases of their forgiveness. Aside from the prototypic traits, these studies also identified traits that can hinder their decision to forgive a transgressor. These traits are generally socially undesirable and were not endorsed as traits for forgiveness.

Hence, when these traits are mixed with other factors, it is expected that prototypic and non-prototypic traits will yield different directions in forgiveness. When the transgressor possesses prototypic traits and taking other possible factors, it is expected that forgiveness tendency to forgive will be reinforced. On the other hand, the transgressor who is showing non-prototypical traits will have difficulty of obtaining forgiveness. Study 3, therefore, tested these hypotheses and also accounted for the information processing between the offense and the traits of the transgressor as well as the degree of the offense. While Studies 1 and 2 provided the consistency of the prototypic and non-prototypic traits, Study 3 evaluates the information processing that people may use in relation to the factors mentioned earlier.

Study 3

Forgiveness as mentioned in many previous studies is a product of the process of cognition, hence is greatly influence by the kind of information that is provided to the individual with regard the transgressor (prototypical or non-prototypical), degree of offense (high or low), and the sequence of information (trait-offense or offense-trait). Study 3 involved the testing the prototypic and non-prototypic traits against the other variables mentioned. A 2 x 2 x 2 between sample experiment was set up to validate the independent and interaction effects of those variables in the tendency of the person forgive. In order to achieve the objectives stated above, a vignette story was created and manipulated.

Method

Sample

A total of 167 college students participated in the experiment. They were recruited through their general education classes. Two participants, however, were excluded in the analysis because of several incomplete responses both to the dependent measure and the manipulation check items. Hence, the data reported is based on 165 the participants. Their age ranges from 16 to 18 ($m=16,78$; $SD=1,85$). Majority of the participants were freshmen students. The

participants were asked to sign an informed consent before participating in the experiment and likewise were debriefed after. Their participation was voluntary and they were not promised anything in return for their participation.

Instrument

Forgiveness questionnaire. Seven statements were constructed that measured participants' tendency to forgive. The statements asked the participants to put their self to the situation of the transgressed and make a judgment with regard the transgressor's offense and their decision to forgive (*i.e.*, I will always remember Melanie's (the transgressor) wrong doing). A 5-point Likert scale was used as their basis of their rating (1-strong disagree, 5-strongly agree). The questionnaire has an internal consistency coefficient of .729.

Manipulation check. After undergoing the experiment, the participants were asked question that evaluated manipulations made. Except for the information sequence, the manipulation on traits and degree of offense were tested. The items in the trait manipulation included a listing of 10 traits (5 prototypical and 5 non-prototypical). Participants were asked to check the traits that were exemplified by the transgressor in the vignette story. Degree of offense, on the other hand, was a 1-item question pertaining to the weight of the offense of the transgressor towards the transgressed. They evaluated the weight of the offense using a scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating the lightest while 5 as the heaviest.

Procedure

Upon the coordination with the general education teachers, the date of the experiment of the experiment was scheduled. While everyone in the class was given an experiment booklet, students were oriented and were given the decision not to participate in the study if they choose to. The experiment booklet is consisted of four parts-the informed consent, profile, the narrative or the vignette story, and the questionnaire. Attached also is the answer sheet for the questionnaire.

Each participant is given one of the 8 manipulated vignette stories. The vignette stories focused on an interpersonal relationship, particularly friendship. There were manipulations made in the vignette stories. First is the trait of the offender, it is either the transgressor possesses a prototypic trait or non-prototypic trait. The trait that was selected in the vignette stories was based on the results of the studies 1 and 2. Both the prototypic and non-prototypic trait were selected using the average ranking in study 1, trait endorsement in the prototypicality

ratings, and the factor loading in the factor analysis. Taking these into consideration, *sincerity* and *emotional immaturity* were manipulated in the vignette stories. To be able to test the information processing of prototypical traits, the sequence of information was manipulated. In this case, participants were exposed to vignette story that either followed the sequence of trait then offense or offense followed by the trait of the offender. Lastly, the stability of the traits was tested in varying degree of offense. Since the degree of offense can be evaluated in a very subjective manner, the monetary representation was used as proxy measure of the degree of offense; hence, the low degree of offense was manipulated using small amount of money while high degree of offense was manipulated using a bigger amount.

Results and discussion

The responses on the dependent measure were analyzed using the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and the analysis of variance (ANOVA). Particularly, the interaction among the prototypical traits, sequence of information, and the degree of offense were tested.

Manipulation check

Trait manipulation

Participants were asked to determine whether the manipulated traits became evident to them, especially while they are reading the vignette story. There are an equal number of prototypic and non-prototypic traits in the list. Aside from the manipulated traits, the other traits selected from the list of traits in study 1 and 2. There are a total of 10 traits in the list.

Table 5. Distribution of trait recognition in the vignette stories

	Yes		No		Total
	f	percentage	f	Percentage	
Prototypic trait (Sincere)	54	67.5	26	32.5	80
Non-prototypic trait (Emotionally immature)	75	88.24	10	11.77	85

Out of 165, 80 of them read a vignette story that describes the transgressor having the prototypic trait, which is sincerity. The remaining 85 read a vignette story describing the transgressor with a non-prototypic trait, which is

emotionally immaturity. In both manipulations, more than 50% of the participants recognized the transgressor according to the manner she was described in the story; although the non-prototypic trait group recognized the trait better than those who read the prototypic trait.

Offense manipulation

The judgment on whether to forgive can be influenced by the degree of offense done by the transgressor. In the vignette stories, there were two manipulations made to illustrate the degree of offense. This was manipulated through the amount of unreturned money. The low degree of offense was manipulated using 100-pesos-unreturned-money while high degree of offense was manipulated using 10,000-pesos-unreturned-money. Participants were asked to evaluate the extent that the transgressor has offended the main character in the vignette story.

There were 80 participants who read a low degree of offense while 85 in the high degree of offense. In the ratings, those who are in the low degree of offense rated the offense lower ($m=3,35$; $SD=1,02$) than those who read the high degree of offense story ($m=3,72$; $SD=.90$). A t-test analysis of these values yields a significant difference [$t(164)=-2.520$; $p<.05$]. This indicates that those who read the 100-pesos-unreturned-money evaluated the offense lighter than those who read the 10000-pesos-unreturned-money vignette story.

Tendency to forgive the transgressor

The main dependent variable of this study is the tendency to forgive the transgressor. After the participants have read the vignette story, they are asked to take the position of the main character and respond on statements measuring their tendency to forgive. This tendency to forgive was tested using the 3 main factors of this study, the traits, the degree of offense, and the sequence of information. All the main effects yielded statistical significant differences. In their ratings, the transgressor who exemplified the prototypical trait ($m=3,925$; $SD=.428$) reported to have higher tendency to forgive than those who have the non-prototypical trait ($m=3,746$; $SD=.615$), [$F_{(1, 157)}=4,573$; $p<.05$; $d=.340$]. In terms of the degree of offense, the transgressor who committed a low degree of offense ($m=4,00$; $SD=.495$) was forgiven than with the high degree of offense ($m=3,680$; $SD=.603$), [$F_{(1, 157)}=15,773$; $p<.05$; $d=.579$]. In the priming sequence, trait-offense sequence ($m=3,928$; $SD=.487$) had the higher tendency to be forgiven than the offense-trait sequence ($m=3,739$; $SD=.612$), [$F_{(1, 157)}=4,710$; $p<.05$;

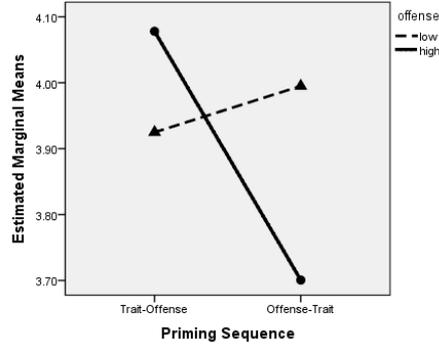
$d=.343$]. These differences are consistent with the hypotheses on the main effects. Noticeably, the effect sizes of the main effects are large. These account for the extent of likelihood to forgive due to saliency of a prototypic characteristic, degree of offense, and trait-offense sequence.

Among the interaction effects, significant results are found between traits and degree of offense [$F_{(1, 157)}=9,470$; $p<.05$; $d=.582$]. In addition, the priming sequence and degree of offense interact significantly with one another [$F_{(1, 157)}=4,400$; $p<.05$; $d=.598$]. The large effect sizes indicate the importance of both factors in making decisions to forgive a person who committed a transgressor. For instance, it may be easier to forgive a person who has committed a low degree of offense with a prototypic trait compared to that of a high degree offense with a non-prototypic offense. On the same manner, a trait-offense sequence can be facilitative in forgiveness-seeking most especially in low degree offense but not necessarily on high degree offense. Although the trait did not interact significantly to priming sequence, it was further examined by separately analyzing the dynamics of prototypic and non-prototypic traits on the tendency to forgive when priming sequence and degree of offense are taking into consideration.

Prototypic and non-prototypic trait analysis

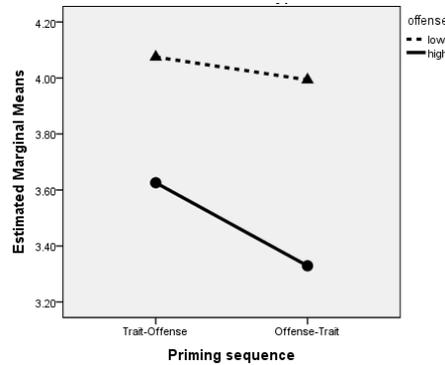
While the main effects and interaction effects were found significant in the previous analysis, the succeeding analysis aims to closely understand how prototypic and non-prototypic traits work in the process of forgiving a transgression. Earlier, results reveal that prototypic traits actually facilitate tendency to forgive while opposite process happens when it is the non-prototypic trait that is possessed. When the degree of offense and priming sequence are taken into consideration, prototypic and non-prototypic traits appear to follow quite a different trajectory. Since the prototypic trait is a desirable characteristic, it is expected to provide consistent effect on the tendency to forgive regardless of the degree of offense as well as when it is presented on latter part of the vignette story (offense-trait priming sequence). Analysis shows that prototypic trait affect the tendency to forgive based on the degree of the offense as well as on priming sequence. Graph 1 illustrates the interaction of these two factors. This shows that recency effect of the prototypic trait is only facilitative to forgiveness when the transgression is considered low degree transgression. On the other

hand, possessing the prototypic trait becomes detrimental to the forgiveness process when the transgression is evaluated as high degree transgression.



Graph 1. Analysis on the degree of offense and priming sequence in prototypic trait

The non-prototypic trait shows a more consistent effect on the perceived degree of offense as well as on the priming sequence. Whether the offense is low or high in degree, recency priming of the non-prototypical traits weakens the tendency of the person to forgive the transgressor. This information confirms that because non-prototypical trait is considered socially undesirable, having such trait makes the person be perceived as more guilty about the transgression.



Graph 2. Analysis on the degree of offense and priming sequence in non-prototypic trait

Study 3 aimed to provide shed light on how people process cognitively the prototypic and non-prototypic traits of transgressors. This tested not only the prototypic and non-prototypic traits but as well the other important elements in processing oneself to forgive, these are the degree of the offense as well as the priming sequence between the transgressor's traits and of the information with regard the offense. Results reveal that non-prototypic traits, both to low and high degree of transgressions, trigger a lower tendency to forgive the transgressor most especially when this negative trait is recently triggered. When the negative characteristics of the person become salient after providing information with regard the transgression, these traits validates the negative impression about the person. Instead the recall of the wrong doing will not be slightly distracted, the offering of the information with regard the personality trait could reinforce passing a negative judgment. This pattern of thinking can also increase the belief of the person that the transgression was made intentionally.

Previous studies explain that when people perceive that transgression as intentionally done, the process of forgiveness is even longer and difficult. The prototypic trait, on the other hand, appears to contribute only when the offense is evaluated as low degree. While there is a notion that people who have desirable traits will be forgiven easily, the offensive action can create a cognitive dissonance about the transgressor's behavior. When one is showing a high prototypic trait, which is usually socially desirable behavior, people create expectations that are consistent with these desirable traits. When a transgression is committed, it requires longer processing of information so as to reconcile the difference between the behavioral expectation and the commission of a transgression, especially if this transgression is too grave.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to examine the information processing of transgression in relation to granting forgiveness. Particularly, this study hypothesized that when forgiveness-seeking process, offense-trait sequence lead to higher tendency to forgive because of the recency effect of the trait and less of the offense while trait-offense sequence in forgiveness-seeking have lower tendency in the forgiveness process. The both hypotheses were confirmed by the results of the present investigation and we are able to provide contexts on which these information processing sequence become effective. The validation of the

first hypothesis can be appreciated in several ways, first, the use of transgressor's desirable traits in forgiveness-seeking is only effective when it is a prototypic trait of a person that can be forgiven, in this case it is being sincere in doing so. Possession of other socially desirable behaviors or personality characteristics may not always lead to forgiveness-granting due to its possible weak association to forgiveness, in general. This finding is consistent with those previous studies reporting forgiveness having a positive association with agreeableness and negative association with neuroticism (Brose, Rye, Lutz-Zois, & Ross, 2005; Shepherd & Belicki, 2008; Wang, 2008). Consequently, the transgressed may not cognitively reconcile the transgressor's forgiveness-seeking behavior and the transgression. In addition, if the victims have not forgiven an offense, they may possibly still ruminate the transgression through the offense related traits, affirming the previous findings of Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, and Fernandez-Capo (2015) that the offense relevant traits are even more salient as compared to non-offense irrelevant traits affecting the decision of granting forgiveness. The presentation of this prototypic trait and the deactivation of non-prototypic trait, in this case it is being emotionally immature, can lead to the activation of essential elements to forgiveness-granting

Lastly, the information processing of offense-trait sequence (trait being referred to as the prototypic trait) is effective in forgiveness-seeking depending on the perceived degree of offense. Specifically, low degree offense can benefit from this information-processing sequence but not the high degree offense. Since low degree offense does not have greater impact on the person, the offense does not appear to be relevant instead the person's character and desirable behavior are given more emphasis. In high degree offense, the impact of the offense might be greater and therefore requires several layers of clarifications on the reasons why such circumstance take place.

The results of the present study have several implications most especially on how forgiveness is being conceptualized. There seem to have a larger agreement that forgiveness is mostly, if not all the time, situated in social contexts. Relationships, for instance, appear to be central in making decisions to forgive a transgressor and pursue the relationship further (*see* Rungduin et al., 2018). However, the present study may not necessarily relay only on the degree of relationship but also on the schema of a person on who is forgivable regardless of the status of this relationship. Having this schema, not of the relationship but of a person, may give the person limited control over one's decision as these

'forgivable traits' can be recognized by another person. Since these traits, when presented, can activate the person's tendency to forgive immediately. It is likewise significant that future examinations may investigate not exactly how attributes may prompt decisional forgiveness (either direct or indirect) but also how these traits can help the process of forgetting. This investigation gives first proof that characteristics and some aspects of it may be utilized to offer forgiveness and will ideally trigger research covering the elements of forgetting in connection with forgiveness and traits.

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