Justice Sensitivity and Forgiveness in Close Interpersonal Relationships: The Mediating Role of Mistrustful, Legitimizing, and Pro-Relationship Cognitions

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ABSTRACT   The purpose of the present investigation was to explore and better understand the relationship between justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective (JS-victim) and interpersonal forgiveness. In particular, we aimed to identify the cognitive mechanisms mediating this relationship and test the moderating influence of post-transgression perpetrator behavior. We used data from a questionnaire study employing a Swiss community sample ($N = 450$) and 2 scenario-based studies employing German online samples, in the context of romantic ($N = 242$)

and friendship relationships ($N = 974$). We consistently found JS-victim to be negatively related to dispositional (Study 1) and situational forgiveness (Studies 2 and 3). Study 2 demonstrated the relationship between JS-victim and reduced forgiveness to be partly mediated by mistrustful interpretations of the partner's post-transgression behavior. In Study 3, cognitions legitimizing one's own antisocial reactions and a lack of pro-relationship cognitions were identified as further mediators. These variables mediated the negative effect of JS-victim on forgiveness largely independent of whether the friend perpetrator displayed reconciliatory behavior or not. Findings suggest that the cognitive mechanisms mediating victim-sensitive individuals' unforgiveness could barely be neutralized. Future research should investigate their malleability in light of qualitatively different perpetrator behaviors as well as their broader relational implications.

Given the imperfection of any potential relationship partner and the fact that personal needs and preferences are not necessarily in accordance with those of others, the experience of irritation, injustice, or hurt in our interpersonal relationships is almost inevitable. Forgiveness researchers have sought to disentangle the interactional mechanisms by which relationship partners handle and work through negative relational events (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Hannon, Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2010). Other studies identified dispositional precursors of forgiveness (e.g., McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Mullet, Neto, & Rivière, 2005). In the current set of studies, we address the question of how justice-related dispositions (i.e., one's dispositional sensitivity with regard to experienced injustice; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Maes, & Arbach, 2005) might be linked to forgiveness processes. We focus on justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective, which has been theorized to represent a blend of genuine concern for justice and self-protective antisocial tendencies (Gollwitzer, Schmitt, Schalke, Maes, & Baer, 2005; Schmitt et al., 2009). Specifically, after demonstrating the consistent negative link of justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective with a number of dispositional forgiveness measures, we turn to the investigation of forgiving motivations in the aftermath of transgression situations. Here, we move beyond a mere trait approach and elaborate on the cognitive mechanisms prompted by transgression situations that might mediate the link of dispositional victim sensitivity with victims' unforgiving motivations in the aftermath of interpersonal hurt.

Forgiveness in Close Interpersonal Relationships

Broadly speaking, forgiveness research addresses the question of how individuals manage to overcome the adverse effects of interpersonal hurt or harm. The act of forgiving a person for harm he or she has caused is referred to as situational forgiveness or forgiving; one's general readiness or capacity to forgive is referred to as dispositional forgiveness, trait forgiveness, or forgivingness (e.g., McCullough, 2000; Roberts, 1995; cf. Allemand, 2008). Scientists from different areas and research traditions have put forward various definitions and operationalizations of forgiveness (for an overview, see Worthington, 2005). McCullough and colleagues (1998) suggested a *prosocial change of motivation toward a transgressor* to constitute the core component of forgiving. In this motivational view, forgiveness, on the one hand, implies the reduction of negative motivational states in terms of diminished *revenge* and *avoidance* motivation (McCullough et al., 1998), and on the other hand, the restoration of *benevolence* (i.e., warmhearted feelings and goodwill; McCullough, Root, & Cohen, 2006). Indeed, relationship researchers have found negative and positive dimensions of forgiving to be associated with different correlates and relationship outcomes (cf. Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004, 2007; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2009), thereby implying that both dimensions are crucial when investigating forgiveness in a close relationship context.

As Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, and Finkel (2005) have pointed out, in close relationships where relationship partners not only have a shared past, but also a—at least potentially—shared future, forgiving becomes an inherently interpersonal process: The question of whether forgiveness can take place not only depends on the victim but is to a great extent also a matter of post-transgression perpetrator behavior. By denying responsibility for or the severity of the offense, for example, perpetrators may well diminish victims' willingness to forgive, whereas expressions of genuine remorse, repentance, apology, or amend making are likely to foster victims' forgiveness (Rusbult et al., 2005; cf. Exline & Baumeister, 2000). Indeed, research on perpetrator-initiated repair tactics has consistently found them to be effective means to foster forgiveness and conflict resolution (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Hannon et al., 2010), and a recent meta-analysis has shown apology to be one of the strongest situational precursors of forgiveness (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010).

Dispositional Predictors of Forgiveness: The Role of Justice Sensitivity

Research on interindividual differences has identified various dispositional precursors of forgiveness: People tend to be more forgiving to the extent that they are more religious (Bono & McCullough, 2004), are more empathic (Brown, 2003; Mullet et al., 2005), are less likely to ruminate about negative interpersonal events (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, & Wade; 2005), and exhibit more agreeable and less neurotic dispositions (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; Mullet et al., 2005). Moreover, being narcissistic predisposes people to react in a vengeful, less forgiving manner (Brown, 2004; Emmons, 2000).

In the area of social justice research, numerous studies have shown that a considerable amount of variation in people's reactions in experimental games and social dilemma situations is also due to justice-related dispositions, such as the belief in a just world (e.g., Lipkus, 1991), preferences for distributive justice (e.g., Davey, Bobocel, Hing, & Zanna, 1999), or attitudes with regard to procedural justice (e.g., Schmitt & Dörfel, 1999). However, although forgiveness researchers have begun to elaborate on the close link between forgiving of interpersonal transgressions and justice (Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003; Karremans & Van Lange, 2005; Witvliet et al., 2008), the relation of justice-related *dispositions* with forgiving per se is yet relatively unchartered territory. A trait potentially holding especially important implications with regard to the question of why and when people forgive is dispositional justice sensitivity (Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, & Maes, 2010; Schmitt et al., 2005). Justice sensitivity refers to interindividual differences in the intensity of the discomfort and indignation people feel when being confronted with injustice or the violation of moral norms. Individuals high in dispositional justice sensitivity are generally deeply concerned about justice: They are not only more likely to interpret ambiguous social situations in terms of justice, but they also experience intense feelings of distress when injustice occurs and tend to ruminate extensively about unjust events. In contrast, individuals low in justice sensitivity are relatively unaffected by justice matters: The perception of justice violations is neither a frequent issue in their daily life nor are they dramatically disturbed with regard to their emotional well-being or their cognitions when injustice occurs (Schmitt et al., 2005, 2009). Notably, the experience of injustice

depends upon the perspective from which a person perceives the violation of a justice norm (cf. Mikula, 1994). The construct of justice sensitivity is composed of four facets corresponding to the four different perspectives people can hold when experiencing injustice: justice sensitivity from a victim's, a perpetrator's, a beneficiary's, and an observer's perspective (Schmitt et al., 2010).

In the current investigation dealing with interpersonal transgressions inflicted on the self, we are focusing on the effects of justice sensitivity from the victim's perspective (JS-victim). This perspective positively correlates with the other justice sensitivity facets and, moreover, a variety of justice-related dispositions (e.g., belief in a just world, belief in immanent and ultimate justice, and sense of injustice), thereby indicating a "common core" corresponding to a justice motive that is shared by all four facets. Nonetheless, as evidenced by differential correlations with other personality constructs and specific behavioral tendencies (Schmitt et al., 2005, 2010), the justice sensitivity facets are by no means interchangeable. For example, the facets of observer and beneficiary sensitivity have been demonstrated to be positively associated with pro-social tendencies and other-related concerns such as empathy or social responsibility, thus conveying the impression that these facets reflect a genuine concern for justice and high moral standards (Gollwitzer et al., 2005; Schmitt et al., 2009). In contrast, correlational patterns and experimental evidence suggest the facet of victim sensitivity to represent a combination of justice-related moral concerns and self-protective motives. Besides its association with justice-related constructs, victim sensitivity goes along with self-related concerns and antisocial tendencies, such as paranoia, jealousy, suspiciousness, belief in an unjust world, and vengeance (Schmitt et al., 2005, 2009). In the context of experimental games and strategic decision making, it has been shown to be associated with more egoistic choices and selfish behaviors (e.g., Fetchenhauer & Huang, 2004). Moreover, being highly victim sensitive has been linked to a greater likelihood of violating moral norms in particularly tempting situations (e.g., employing a moonlighter to renovate one's house, deceiving an insurance company) and relative ease of justifying these norm violations despite judging the same deeds as morally wrong (Gollwitzer et al., 2005). Taken together, this pattern of results gives rise to the notion that being victim sensitive predisposes individuals to not only be very sensitive toward violations of justice norms and the "moral order," but also to

react in a defensive and sometimes antisocial manner when facing the risk of being exploited or unfairly disadvantaged (cf. Gollwitzer et al., 2005; Gollwitzer & Rothmund, 2011). Given that interpersonal hurts are often perceived as unfair, immoral, or unjustified and an unresolved transgression may create a so-called "injustice gap" (Exline et al., 2003) while at the same time being likely to prompt fear of future maltreatment or exploitation, one might well expect victim sensitivity, which taps into the justice motive as well as self-related concerns and the need for self-protection, to strongly predict unforgiving reactions to interpersonal transgressions.

Victim Sensitivity as Sensitivity to Mean Intentions of Others

Lately, Gollwitzer and Rothmund (2009) have suggested explicitly reconceptualizing justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective as sensitivity to mean intentions of others. The authors posit that—besides being overly sensitive to the experience of justice violations—individuals high in JS-victim exhibit a pronounced readiness to react to cues that may indicate malicious motives of interaction partners, ultimately making them more likely to adopt a self-protective and defensive attitude in their social interactions. Gollwitzer, Rothmund, Pfeiffer, and Ensenbach (2009) tested this assumption within a public goods dilemma, in which they manipulated meanness cues by varying information regarding the number of people who had violated fairness rules in previous rounds. The authors attained evidence that individuals high in JS-victim did not differ with regard to their contributions when they had no or clear indication of others' unfairness (no violators or many violators). Yet individuals high in JS-victim contributed significantly less than individuals low in JS-victim when there was only slight indication of others' unfairness (some violators). This pattern of results indicates that persons high in JS-victim are particularly concerned about being treated in an unfair manner, giving rise to pronounced self-protection motivation.

Gollwitzer and Rothmund (2009) have elaborated on the mechanism behind this context-specific pattern of defensive, self-protective reactions and argued that individuals high in victim sensitivity who are confronted with ambiguous contextual cues are likely to get into a so-called "suspicious mindset." This mindset consists of an attributional bias toward corroborating an a priori held expectation that other people are not trustworthy, a strong motivation to avoid being exploited, as well as a heightened accessibility for cognitions that

legitimize one's own antisocial reactions. Albeit so far it has been tested merely in the context of experimental games, we believe that the notion of justice sensitivity as sensitivity to mean intentions can be successfully applied to difficult interpersonal situations, such as transgressions in close relationships. Relational transgressions often imply the violation of shared or mutually agreed upon moral norms, relationship-specific rules, or expectations (Metts, 1994). In contrast to very mild transgressions (i.e., those that may be annoying but do not represent grave deviations from core expectations within the relationship), the occurrence of more severe transgressions may call into question a relationship partner's trustworthiness and the degree to which he or she holds benign intentions toward the self. Whereas very severe transgressions (e.g., chronic cheating or physical abuse) can be seen as clear indications that the other should not be trusted, relational transgressions of moderate intensity constitute a context of relative ambiguity, offering less definite information with regard to the close other's intentions toward the self. Yet it appears to be exactly such difficult but ambiguous situations that are likely to prompt a suspicious mindset in individuals high in JS-victim. Via specific post-transgression cognitions, their suspicious state of mind may then result in pronounced unforgiving reactions to interpersonal hurt.

Cognitive Mechanisms in Victim-Sensitive Individuals

In the following, we delineate the cognitive mechanisms that may be prompted by transgression situations in individuals high in victim sensitivity, ultimately leading to reduced forgiveness in the aftermath of interpersonal transgressions.

Mistrustful interpretations of reconciliatory perpetrator behavior. Conciliatory gestures such as apology or amend making are common behaviors exhibited by forgiveness-seeking perpetrators (Goffman, 1971; Schlenker, 1980), effectively fostering forgiveness of adverse relationship events and resolution of relational conflict (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Hannon et al., 2010). Besides conveying remorse and concern for the victim's suffering (cf. Fehr et al., 2010), perpetrator-initiated repair tactics may diminish the injustice gap resulting from an unresolved transgression (cf. Exline et al., 2003). Importantly, these behaviors may also communicate a perpetrator's

benign intent toward the victim of his wrongdoing (cf. Tabak, McCullough, Root, Bono, & Berry, 2012) and, hence, directly serve as a proximal cue inspiring confidence in the other's goodwill and trustworthiness. Nonetheless, reconciliatory perpetrator behaviors may hold manipulative potential: When a perpetrator is not really sorry for the committed wrong but is rather looking for a cheap possibility to "get off the hook," a victim may be willfully deceived with regard to mutually shared moral codes and rules—thereby running the risk of offering undeserved forgiveness to an unremorseful perpetrator, who might then impose further costs upon the victim by transgressing again in the relationship future (cf. Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Wallace, Exline, & Baumeister, 2008). In this light, carefully contemplating possible motives held by a seemingly remorseful perpetrator seems adaptive. Yet persons high in JS-victim, with their pronounced sensitivity to others' mean intentions, might be especially prone to infer ulterior motives behind reconciliatory behaviors of an interaction partner (corresponding to an attributional bias toward corroborating expectations of others' untrustworthiness; cf. Gollwitzer & Rothmund, 2009), likely to result in unforgiving reactions in the aftermath of interpersonal hurt despite perpetrator attempts to reconcile.

Legitimizing cognitions.   As Gollwitzer and Rothmund (2009) have suggested, apart from their bias toward mistrustfully interpreting others' behavior, individuals high in JS-victim should also show a heightened accessibility of cognitions aimed at legitimizing one's own potential antisocial reactions. In our view, cognitions of this kind may fall into at least two distinct categories: self-protective legitimizing cognitions and normative legitimizing cognitions. The first type, self-protective legitimizing cognitions, mirrors an individual's fear that may arise when one is hurt by someone else: Was this a single, discrete offense the other is not likely to repeat, or does one have to be afraid of the possibility of becoming victimized again? This type of legitimizing cognitions deals with the idea that one should signal that a transgression is not to be foreborn in order to protect the self. For example, an individual may think that he or she has to make clear that a specific hurt or harmful behavior is not being accepted to keep the perpetrator from behaving likewise in the relationship future. In that vein, self-protective legitimizing cognitions reflect the self-concerned, defensive component of the JS-victim

motive blend. The second type, normative legitimizing cognitions, is of a more general and moralistic character and does not deal with self-protection per se. Yet it may mirror, for example, one's reasoning that a perpetrator should be taught a lesson that his behavior is per se unbearable, unjust, or immoral. This type of legitimizing cognitions may also entail moral justifications of potential payback in the face of norm violations and other measures taken to restore the "moral order." In that vein, normative legitimizing cognitions represent the more moralistic, justice-concerned component of the JS-victim motive blend. Ultimately, both types of legitimizing cognitions are thought to foster unforgiving reactions to interpersonal transgressions.

Pro-relationship cognitions. In the case of close and committed relationships, where transgressing partners—albeit just having behaved badly—have provided numerous benefits in the relational past, victims will not only experience negativity with regard to the perpetrator after a transgression has occurred. Most likely, hurt individuals in committed relationships may also come up with accommodative, pro-relationship thoughts: For example, victims may acknowledge the fact that occasional hurt is necessarily part of all close relationships or else may reflect upon the unique value of the perpetrating person and the relationship that existed before the transgression occurred. Indeed, McCullough, Luna, Berry, Tabak, and Bono (2010) attained evidence that victims who thought about the positive and valuable qualities of their transgressors and their relationships with these forgave to a greater extent than those not contemplating relationship partners' positive characteristics. Given the overall negative quality of a suspicious state of mind and the fact that individuals are more likely to remember aspects of persons and situations that are congruent with their current affective state (mood congruency effect; cf. Gilligan & Bower, 1984), one may assume a person high in JS-victim to be less likely to harbor forgiveness-promoting, pro-relationship cognitions (e.g., thinking about the good sides of the perpetrating person or shared joyful experiences of the past).

Overview of the Present Investigation

Despite the growing trend in the literature to link forgiveness to justice, little is known about forgiveness and its relation to specific

justice-related dispositions. This gap merits further investigation. Justice sensitivity from the victim's perspective might be an especially promising candidate in this endeavor because being high on this personality trait can be theorized to involve two specific motive dispositions that are especially important in the context of forgiving: the justice motive and the self-protection motive. Since justice and self-protection are two concerns that might be of high importance to forgiveness processes in general, the study of persons high in justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective will also be informative with regard to the fundamental question of when and why individuals forgive. The present investigation examined the link between justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective and forgiveness, drawing on three diverse samples. In Study 1, we employed a community sample and established the negative association between JS-victim and dispositional forgiveness. In Studies 2 and 3, we recruited online samples and investigated the presumed negative association between JS-victim and situational forgiveness. Here, we used standardized scenarios dealing with transgressions in close relationships (i.e., partner and friend relationships) and put an emphasis on forgiving and unforgiving motivations in the aftermath of a transgression. Assuming JS-victim and its two inherent motives to involve specific post-transgression cognitions (e.g., mistrustful interpretations and cognitions centering on self-protection and the restoration of justice), in Studies 2 and 3 we addressed specific cognitive mediators of the JS-victim/forgiveness link. Moreover, in Study 3, we tested whether these mechanisms (and associated unforgiving reactions) might be attenuated when perpetrators show reconciliatory behavior in the aftermath of the transgression as opposed to when they do not.

STUDY 1

In Study 1, we examined the association between JS-victim and dispositional forgiveness using a variety of measures, including global indicators of one's dispositional willingness to forgive and indicators of one's tendency to react to interpersonal transgressions with specific transgressor-related motivations (i.e., revenge, avoidant, and benevolent motivation). We hypothesized JS-victim to exhibit a negative relationship with forgiving. More specifically, we

assumed JS-victim to be negatively related to measures mirroring forgiveness and to be positively related to measures mirroring unforgiveness.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The community sample consisted of 450 adults (56.7% women) living in the city of Zurich, Switzerland. Participant age ranged from 20 to 83, with a mean age of 52.3 years ($SD = 16.9$). Educational attainment varied widely: 7.8% of the participants had basic education as the highest level of education, 44.5% had a high school education or equivalent, 24.9% had completed a degree from a technical school, and 22.7% had completed a university degree. Regarding marital status, 32.4% were single, 48.2% were married, 12.3% were either separated or divorced, and 7.1% were widowed.

Addresses of prospective study participants were randomly selected from a list compiled by the registration office of the city of Zurich. From each birth year (1927 to 1987), 30 adults were included with an approximately equal ratio of men and women, resulting in 1,800 potential participants. Potential participants were mailed a multiscale study questionnaire including various measures of forgivingness as well as a victim sensitivity scale, which was then to be filled out and sent back via a preaddressed, prepaid envelope. Since the sampling procedure included deleting addresses to protect privacy, it was not possible to remind participants to fill out the questionnaire; the response rate was 25%. All participants were unpaid volunteers. To determine the degree of sample selectivity, we compared the initial sample of potential participants ($N = 1,800$) with the final sample ($N = 450$) with respect to age and gender. The mean age in the final sample ($M = 52.3$, $SD = 16.9$) was slightly higher than in the initial sample ($M = 50.6$, $SD = 17.0$). However, in terms of effect sizes, this difference is rather small ($d = .10$). The gender distribution in the initial sample was 53.0% women to 47.0% men. Slightly more women participated in the study sample (56.7%). More details on the sampling procedure and further information about the study are provided by Hill and Allemand (2010).

Measures

Participants completed a 10-item measure of justice sensitivity from the victim's perspective (JS-victim; Schmitt et al., 2005). On a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), participants indicated the degree to which they usually feel indignation and

discomfort when being treated unfairly. Example items include "It bothers me when others receive something that ought to be mine" and "I can't easily bear it when others profit unilaterally from me." Reliability of the measure was high; α = .90.

Furthermore, participants completed a total of three forgiveness measures, two of which were multifaceted (i.e., consisted of two to three subscales). The Tendency to Forgive Scale (TTF; Brown, 2003) is a brief four-item self-descriptive measure of one's dispositional forgiveness. Participants reacted to a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) to items such as " 'I tend to get over it quickly when someone hurts my feelings." Reliability of the measure was sufficient; α = .71.

The Willingness to Forgive Scale (WFS; Allemand, Sassin-Meng, Huber, & Schmitt, 2008) is a brief eight-item scenario-based measure in which a conceptual distinction is proposed between one's willingness to forgive a transgressor who shows remorse for his behavior and one's willingness to forgive a transgressor who does not do so. Participants were instructed to imagine a series of scenarios, with four scenarios describing a situation where the transgressor signals remorse (e.g., "A close acquaintance lies to you to gain personal advantage for herself. Later she says she is sorry and wants to change") and four scenarios depicting a situation where the transgressor does not show any remorse (e.g., "A friend consciously abuses your trust for her personal gain and isn't sorry about doing so"), and were then to consider the likelihood that they would be willing to forgive the wrongdoer on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not likely at all*) to 5 (*extremely likely*). The willingness to forgive with remorse subscale reached an internal consistency of α = .85; the reliability of the willingness to forgive without remorse subscale was α = .74.

Finally, participants filled out a measure of Transgression-Related Interpersonal Dispositions (TRID; Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005), which is based on the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998, 2006). The TRID consists of 11 items and assesses how participants typically respond to interpersonal hurt. All items begin with the stem "When someone angers me or hurts my feelings, I . . ." and describe one possible reaction. Participants rated how well each description characterized their typical reactions to transgressions on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The items refer to one of three hypothesized TRIM dimensions: avoidance (four items; e.g., "don't want to have anything to do with him or her"), revenge (four items; e.g., "find little ways to get back at her [him] for what she or he did"), and benevolence (three items; e.g., "generally don't stay upset with him [her] for

long"). Reliabilities of the brief scales were sufficient, with the avoidance subscale reaching an α of .79, the revenge subscale an α of .67, and the benevolence subscale an α of .74.

Results and Discussion

To investigate the association of JS-victim with forgiving, we used three different instruments to assess dispositional forgiveness, with two of these measures being multifaceted. When computing Pearson correlations (two-sided test), all six forgiveness measures proved to be significantly related to JS-victim. As expected, measures mirroring forgiveness (i.e., the TTF, the WFS subscales, and the benevolence facet of the TRID) showed negative associations with JS-victim. In contrast, measures representing unforgiving dispositions (i.e., the revenge and the avoidance facet of the TRID) exhibited positive relationships with JS-victim. Controlling for gender did not alter any of the JS-victim/forgiveness relations in a substantial way, nor did it affect correlations of the other study variables. Table 1 shows the correlations of all measures, including the correlations of interest between the forgiveness measures and JS-victim as well as means and standard deviations of all study variables.

In spite of having found associations with JS-victim that are robust across different forgiveness measures, the finding of the consistent link between JS-victim and forgiving was limited to dispositional measures of forgiveness and therefore had to be established for situational forgiveness in a next step. Moreover, since the trait correlation design of Study 1 prevented us from examining possible underlying mechanisms of the negative relation between JS-victim and forgiveness, in Study 2 we turned to the investigation of the mediating role of mistrustful interpretations of reconciliatory perpetrator behavior.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we examined the association between dispositional victim sensitivity (JS-victim) and situational forgiveness with respect to partner relationships. We used transgression scenarios within a partnership context, where a partner was first said to have transgressed and then showed reconciliatory behavior in the aftermath of the transgression. We concentrated on reactions in terms of

Table 1
Study 1: Correlations of Study Variables and Descriptives

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD
1. JS–victim	—							2.57	0.96
2. TTF	-.38***	—						3.94	1.16
3. WFS–With remorse	-.22***	.35***	—					3.38	0.90
4. WFS–Without remorse	-.26***	.31***	.46***	—				2.15	0.72
5. TRID–Revenge	.29***	-.48***	-.32***	-.12**	—			2.24	0.89
6. TRID–Avoidance	.34***	-.51***	-.25***	-.18***	.52***	—		3.39	1.12
7. TRID–Benevolence	-.14**	.45***	.35***	.15**	-.29***	-.24***	—	3.72	1.09

Note. *N*s range from 440 to 447 for the respective analysis. JS–victim = justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective; TTF = Tendency to Forgive Scale; WFS = Willingness to Forgive Scale; TRID = transgression-related interpersonal dispositions. ***$p < .001$. **$p < .01$, two-sided test.

transgressor-related interpersonal motivations (i.e., revenge, avoidant, and benevolent motivation with regard to one's partner) as our outcome. Since we assumed that a transgression situation should prompt individuals high in JS-victim to get into a suspicious mindset in which they would be likely to mistrustfully interpret their partner's reconciliatory behavior, we examined mistrustful interpretations of a partner's reconciliatory behavior as a possible mediator of the JS-victim/forgiveness relationship.

We chose a variant of apologetic behavior (i.e., expressing one's regret) and amend making for being prototypical forgiveness-seeking behaviors that have been shown to successfully promote forgiving in prior research (cf. Fehr et al., 2010; Hannon et al., 2010). We reasoned that reconciliatory behaviors should be more efficient in conveying sincerity of perpetrator remorse when shown in combination (e.g., explicit acknowledgment/apology together with amends; cf. Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Förster, & Montada, 2004). Therefore, we expected mistrust interpretations to play a more important role in fostering unforgiving reactions when only a single reconciliatory behavior was exhibited as opposed to when a combination of reconciliatory behaviors was shown.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The study was conducted online via the Unipark platform of the University of the Armed Forces in Munich (UniBW Munich), Germany. Via a mailing list, students were invited to take part in an online study about specific situations in romantic relationships. To ensure that participants would be able to properly imagine the depicted partnership scenarios, in the recruitment email we asked for the participation of "persons that are currently in a romantic relationship." Participants were neither paid nor received course credit, but they were offered the possibility of receiving automated, individualized feedback with regard to their behavior in romantic relationships once they had completed the survey.

The final sample consisted of 242 students. Mean age was 25.0 years ($SD = 8.2$), and 41.3% were female. Of the participants, 18.2% indicated they were already married; the rest were in dating relationships. Relationship duration varied widely: 26.4% indicated they were in relationships with up to 12 months of duration, 21.1% in relationships with up to 2 years of duration, 31.1% in relationships with up to 5 years of duration, and 21.1% in relationships with more than 5 years of duration.

After filling out demographic data and questions about their relationship status, participants completed a measure of justice sensitivity from the victim's perspective (JS-victim). Afterward, they were randomly assigned to one of three possible transgression scenarios after which their respective partner was said to show reconciliatory behavior. After imagining the scenario, they had to interpret their partner's behavior and indicate their degree of forgiveness.

Measures

JS-victim was assessed with the same version of Schmitt and colleagues' (2005) scale as in Study 1. Again, reliability was high; $\alpha = .86$.

Mistrustful interpretations of the transgressing partner's reconciliatory behavior were assessed via a six-item measure specifically developed for the purposes of this study. Example items include "He/she just wants to manipulate me," "He/she just wants to prevent me from being sulky," and "He/she is afraid that I could seek revenge for his/her wrongdoing." Participants indicated how likely it would be that they would have the respective thought on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 6 (*very much likely*). The reliability of this measure was $\alpha = .69$.

Forgiveness facets were assessed with a slightly modified version of the Marital Forgiveness Scale—Event (Fincham et al., 2004). Participants indicated their likelihood to experience specific reactions in response to their partner's transgression on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 6 (*very much likely*). Example items include "I retaliate or do something to get my own back" (revenge), "I don't want to have anything to do with her/him" (avoidance), and "I am able to act as positively toward my partner now as I was before" (benevolence). Reliability of the revenge facet was $\alpha = .76$, reliability of the avoidance facet was $\alpha = .85$, and reliability of the benevolence facet was $\alpha = .82$.

Scenarios

Participants were confronted with one of three romantic transgression scenarios that had been chosen on the basis of a pretest. Using a sample of 27 individuals (mean age = 25.7, $SD = 2.2$; 40.7% female), the 15 pretest scenarios were rated with regard to their severity and the degree to which they were perceived as realistic. Mean severity was 4.48 ($SD = 1.51$) and mean realism was 3.27 ($SD = 3.4$) on 6-point Likert-type scales. We finally chose three scenarios representing moderate severity and rated as sufficiently realistic to ensure that participants would be able to properly imagine the scenario.

Scenario 1 (severity $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.00$; realism $M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.50$) read as follows: "Your partner says something to you that deeply offends you. Although you tell him (her) how much you feel hurt by that, he (she) is neither willing to withdraw his (her) statement nor to talk over the issue with you." Scenario 2 (severity $M = 5.21$, $SD = 0.78$; realism $M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.17$) was as follows: "During a dinner with mutual friends your partner disparages you. Unnoticed by your friends you let him (her) know that you find that inappropriate, but he (she) cannot refrain from making another taunting comment." In Scenario 3 (severity $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.33$; realism $M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.39$), participants were confronted with the following situation: "After doing the grocery shopping you enter the flat without your partner noticing you. He (she) is on the phone. While you are putting the groceries into the fridge, you overhear him (her) talking condescendingly about you."

Post-transgression reconciliatory behavior was varied insofar as the transgressing partner was either said to have (a) expressed regret, (b) offered compensation, or (c) expressed regret and offered compensation to the offended participant when the issue came up in a later conversation.

Results and Discussion

First, we tested whether effects varied as a function of the scenario; as expected, this was not the case. Rather unexpectedly, the three reconciliatory behavior conditions did not differ significantly in the level of mistrust expressed by victims, suggesting that participants did not perceive differences between the single versus combined reconciliatory behavior conditions. Therefore, we collapsed across scenarios and reconciliatory post-transgression perpetrator behaviors for our mediation analyses. Table 2 shows correlations and descriptives of all study variables.[1]

Mediation Analyses

To investigate whether JS-victim heightened the readiness to mistrustfully interpret a partner's reconciliatory behavior, and whether this pronounced suspiciousness mediated the hypothesized effects of JS-victim on the forgiveness facets, we performed bootstrapping analyses using the SPSS INDIRECT macro of Preacher and Hayes (2008). Since we aimed to control for covariates in our mediation

1. We also examined whether study variables or their correlations varied as a function of relationship duration and relationship status; this was not the case.

Table 2
Study 2: Correlations of Study Variables and Descriptives

	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*
1. JS-victim	—					4.15	0.82
2. Mistrustful interpretations	.28***	—				3.35	0.97
3. Revenge	.34***	.39***	—			2.19	1.10
4. Avoidance	.32***	.33***	.42***	—		2.81	1.40
5. Benevolence	−.14*	−.25***	−.30***	−.68***	—	3.85	1.29

Note. $N = 242$. JS-victim = justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective. ***$p < .001$. *$p < .05$, two-sided test.

analyses, we used the INDIRECT macro procedure, which provides this possibility in contrast to the SOBEL macro (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Gender (coded as female = 0, male = 1), age, and relationship status (unmarried = 0, married = 1) were treated as covariates in all analyses. First, we briefly describe the results concerning the covariates; then we address the main results of the mediation analyses.

Covariates. Women demonstrated marginally higher revenge motivation than men, $\beta = -.10$, $t(235) = -1.73$, $p = .084$; age and relationship status did not influence revenge ($ps > .61$). Likewise, women displayed higher avoidance than men, $\beta = -.33$, $t(235) = -6.06$, $p < .001$; married persons were more avoidant than unmarried individuals, $\beta = .16$, $t(235) = 2.91$, $p < .01$. Age did not affect avoidance ($p > .29$). Also, men showed higher benevolence than women, $\beta = .30$, $t(235) = 4.88$, $p < .001$; unmarried people reacted with marginally more benevolence than married ones, $\beta = -.12$, $t(235) = -1.89$, $p = .060$. Age was also marginally related to benevolence, $\beta = .10$, $t(235) = 1.72$, $p = .087$.

Revenge. Initially, two separate regressions showed an effect of victim sensitivity on mistrustful interpretations, $\beta = .29$, $t(236) = 4.64$, $p < .001$, and revenge motivation, $\beta = .33$, $t(236) = 5.46$, $p < .001$, indicating that JS-victim augmented suspiciousness as well as vengeance motivation following a partner transgression. When JS-victim and mistrustful interpretations were entered simultaneously into the regression to predict revenge, mistrustful

interpretations were positively associated with revenge, $\beta = .33$, $t(235) = 5.40$, $p < .001$, whereas the effect of JS-victim was somewhat reduced, $\beta = .24$, $t(235) = 3.97$, $p < .001$. Overall, 22% of the variance in revenge was explained. Bootstrapping results demonstrated that the 95% confidence interval of the indirect effect did not contain zero [0.05, 0.16], supporting our prediction that mistrustful interpretations partially mediate the effect of JS-victim on revenge motivation.

Avoidance.   As with revenge, victim sensitivity was positively associated with avoidance motivation, $\beta = .29$, $t(236) = 5.04$, $p < .001$. Predicting avoidance simultaneously with victim sensitivity, mistrustful interpretations were positively related to avoidance, $\beta = .29$, $t(235) = 5.18$, $p < .001$. Again, the effect of JS-victim was diminished due to controlling mistrustful interpretations, $\beta = .20$, $t(235) = 3.58$, $p < .001$. Overall, 31% of the variance in avoidance was explained. Bootstrapping revealed the indirect effect of JS-victim on avoidance through mistrustful interpretations to be statistically significant, as the 95% confidence interval values did not contain zero [0.05, 0.14].

Benevolence.   As predicted, victim sensitivity was negatively linked to benevolence, $\beta = -.11$, $t(236) = -1.88$, $p = .061$. Although this total effect was only marginally significant, it is still possible that JS-victim influences benevolence through mistrustful interpretations, since a significant total effect is not regarded as a necessary precondition for a significant and meaningful indirect effect (Hayes, 2009). Mistrustful interpretations weakened benevolence when predicting it simultaneously with victim sensitivity, $\beta = -.26$, $t(235) = -4.16$, $p < .001$. After controlling for mistrustful interpretations, the effect of JS-victim became nonsignificant, $\beta = -.04$, $t(235) = -0.66$, $p = .512$. Overall, 17% of the variance in benevolence was explained. Bootstrapping analysis confirmed the indirect effect of JS-victim on benevolence through mistrustful interpretations to be different from zero [−0.13, −0.04].

   Taken together, the relationship between JS-victim and forgiveness was found to be at least partially mediated by participants' mistrustful interpretations of their partner's reconciliatory behavior for all facets. Still, the direct effects remained significant in the case of revenge and avoidance motivation, suggesting that there might be further mediators of the relationship between JS-victim and forgive-

ness above and beyond mistrustful interpretations of a partner's reconciliatory behavior. To get at this was the purpose of Study 3.

STUDY 3

In Study 3, we examined the association between dispositional victim sensitivity (JS-victim) and situational forgiveness with respect to friend relationships and made participants imagine a transgression committed by a close friend. Despite being a common perpetrator response in the aftermath of a transgression (Goffman, 1971; Schlenker, 1980), reconciliatory behavior is not attempted by all perpetrators: When trying to simply pass over the situation (e.g., by ignoring the issue when it comes up in a later conversation or not reacting to the victim's hints that a certain behavior was irritating or disturbing), perpetrators may miss the opportunity to weaken the victim's grudge and resentment. In the third study, we intended to investigate how persons high in victim sensitivity would react in a situation where a perpetrator violated the social norm of apologizing and showing remorse after having committed a transgression as opposed to a situation in which perpetrator remorse was shown. We reasoned that when victim sensitivity represents justice concerns as well as the need for self-protection, reconciliatory behavior—which on the one hand might partly restore justice and on the other hand can signal the perpetrator's benign intent—might attenuate the negative relationship of victim sensitivity with forgiving motivations. To put it differently, we hypothesized that victim sensitivity effects on unforgiveness might be weaker when post-transgression remorse is displayed relative to when it is lacking.

Since we were particularly interested in the cognitive mediators of the relationship between JS-victim and forgiveness, the main focus of Study 3 was on the simultaneous test of the four types of cognitive mediators: mistrustful interpretations of the interaction partner's post-transgression behavior, normative as well as self-protective legitimizing cognitions, and pro-relationship cognitions. We expected the negative relation between JS-victim and forgiveness to be completely mediated by these four types of post-transgression cognitions. With regard to the impact of reconciliatory behavior on JS-victim links to the cognitive mediators, we speculated that when perpetrators show attempts to reconcile (thereby possibly diminish-

ing victims' perceived need for self-protection and their desire to restore justice), the link of victim sensitivity to both types of legitimizing cognitions should be somewhat attenuated as compared to a situation where the perpetrator fails to do so.

Method

Sample and Procedure

The study was conducted online via the *PSYTESTS* platform of Humboldt-University Berlin. To recruit participants, we informed former participants who had registered for notification via newsletter that a new study dealing with situations in the context of friendship would be online and, moreover, distributed the study announcement via a student mailing list. As compensation for taking part, participants were offered individualized feedback on some constructs of the study.

The final sample consisted of 974 individuals, of which 71.1% stated they were enrolled as a student and 20.1% indicated working in different professions. The rest of the sample were either not currently working or already retired. Mean age was 27.9 ($SD = 8.2$), and 69.7% of the participants were female. We examined whether study variables differed as a function of being a student or not; this was not the case.

After providing demographic data, participants filled out the same JS-victim measure used in Studies 1 and 2. Then they were randomly assigned to one of three possible scenarios in which they were to imagine a close friend treating the participant badly. After having committed the transgression, the friend perpetrator either showed reconciliatory behavior (i.e., apologized and offered amends) or tried to pass over the situation by ignoring the topic when it came up in conversation. After imagining the scenario, participants had to interpret the scenario and their friend's behavior and indicated their likelihood of specific cognitions as well as their degree of forgiveness.

Measures

JS-victim was assessed with the same version of Schmitt and colleagues' (2005) scale as in Studies 1 and 2. Again, the scale's reliability was high; $\alpha = .87$.

For all four types of post-transgression cognitions, participants indicated the likelihood of experiencing the respective thoughts on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 6 (*very much likely*). As the perpetrator's post-transgression behavior was varied in Study 3, we could not use the same mistrustful interpretations scale in both conditions. Therefore, we developed different items for the reconciliatory behavior and

the no reconciliatory behavior condition that were specifically tailored to the condition's respective content and selected items based on a pretest. The final scales both consisted of five items and had sufficient reliabilities: $\alpha = .74$ (reconciliatory behavior), $\alpha = .66$ (no reconciliatory behavior). Example items are "He (she) fears I might speak evil of him/her" and "He (she) just wants to appease me" in the reconciliatory behavior condition, and "He (she) seems to think that I forget about the incident if he/she acts as if nothing has happened" and "My feelings do not seem to matter to him (her)" in the no reconciliatory behavior condition.

Two legitimizing cognition scales were developed for the purpose of the study. The first set of items, consisting of four items, deals with the idea that one has to signal to the perpetrator that his behavior is not being accepted in order to protect the self (i.e., to prevent him or others from reoffending). Example items include "If I do not make it clear that I am not to tolerate something like that, he (she) will possibly treat me like that again" and "If I put up with everything, one day everyone will treat me badly." The second set of items, containing seven items, taps into the idea that the friend had to be taught that his behavior was not tolerable in a normative sense or favored moralistic justifications of potential payback. Example items include "He (she) has to learn that such behavior cannot remain unpunished" and "Someone who behaves like that should not be surprised when he or she gets a payback one day." Reliabilities of the two subscales were good, with $\alpha = .80$ for self-protective legitimizing cognitions and $\alpha = .85$ for normative legitimizing cognitions, respectively.

To assess pro-relationship cognitions, we developed a set of items drawing on item content of a measure of perceived relationship value by McCullough et al. (2010) and complemented this item set with other accommodative reflections dealing with the idea that hurtful events and irritation are to be accepted as parts of human life and close relationships. Example items include "I think about the good times that we have experienced with each other," "I concentrate on his (her) good sides," and "I try to accept such unfavorable incidents as part of human life." The total scale, consisting of seven items, reached adequate reliability; $\alpha = .76$.

Again, forgiveness facets were assessed with a slightly modified version of Fincham and colleagues' (2004) forgiveness scale, rephrased to reflect friend relationships. Reliability of the revenge facet was $\alpha = .73$, reliability of the avoidance facet was $\alpha = .86$, and reliability of the benevolence facet was $\alpha = .85$.

Scenarios

As in Study 2, participants were confronted with one of three scenarios chosen on the basis of a pretest; this time, all situations referred to trans-

gressions committed by a close friend. For the pretest, we used a sample of 129 individuals (mean age = 23.0, $SD = 4.4$; 91% female) who were recruited via a student mailing list. Students were presented with seven scenarios in which "a good friend" transgressed and rated the degree to which the scenarios were seen as realistic and severe on 6-point Likert-type scales. Mean severity of the seven pretested scenarios was 5.04 ($SD = 0.98$), and mean realism was 3.43 ($SD = 1.41$). As for Study 2, we chose three scenarios seen as sufficiently realistic and moderately severe.

Scenario 1 (severity $M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.60$; realism $M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.72$) read as follows: "You are having lunch at a restaurant. Suddenly you notice that a group of people at the table next to you, not realizing you sit nearby, is talking about you and laughing. When listening more carefully you become aware that a good friend of yours must have told something from your past that really embarrasses you and which you would not have liked to be disclosed to anybody." In Scenario 2 (severity $M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.58$; realism $M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.66$), participants were confronted with the following situation: "While being on a shopping tour downtown you see a good friend of yours and approach him (her) to say hello. He (she) does not see you, because he (she) is deeply involved in a conversation with the person that accompanies her. When you get closer, you hear him (her) talking in a disparaging manner about someone. You stop and realize that the person that was talked about badly is yourself." Scenario 3 (severity $M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.44$; realism $M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.64$) was as follows: "You have bought an extraordinary birthday present for a good friend and have invested a great deal of time and effort to find it. One day you are at the place of a mutual acquaintance. To your surprise you discover the very present you had given your friend for his (her) birthday and find out that he (she) has just given it away."

After presenting the scenario situation, post-transgression perpetrator behavior was varied insofar as the friend was said to have either (a) asked for pardon, said that he or she is very sorry, and offered amends (condition: reconciliatory behavior) when the topic came up in a later conversation or (b) taken up the topic briefly, but then turned the conversation to something else (condition: no reconciliatory behavior). Similar to Study 2, descriptions of perpetrator behavior were kept brief and comparable in length.

Results and Discussion

The three scenarios were analyzed in combination, since effects did not vary as a function of scenario. Table 3 shows correlations and descriptives of all study variables.

<div align="center">

Table 3
Study 3: Correlations of Study Variables and Descriptives

</div>

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	*M*	*SD*
1. JS-victim	—								3.95	0.93
2. Mistrustful interpretations	.31	—							3.48	1.09
3. Self-prot. legitimizing cognitions	.34	.43	—						3.74	1.34
4. Normative legitimizing cognitions	.33	.42	.62	—					2.19	1.05
5. Pro-relationship cognitions	−.24	−.31	−.39	−.32	—				3.86	0.96
6. Revenge	.28	.27	.37	.63	−.29	—			1.84	0.95
7. Avoidance	.32	.45	.50	.39	−.55	.32	—		3.33	1.44
8. Benevolence	−.24	−.38	−.38	−.30	.62	−.23	−.65	—	3.38	1.29

Note. *N*s range from 967 to 974 for the respective analysis. Mistrustful interpretations represents the combined measure from both conditions, since the means of the respective scales did not differ as a function of the condition. JS-victim = justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective.
All correlations significant at $p < .001$, two-sided test.

Mediation Analyses

To test whether the negative effect of victim sensitivity on forgiveness was in fact mediated by mistrustful interpretations of the friend's post-transgression behavior, legitimizing cognitions of one's own self-protective reactions, normative legitimizing cognitions, and pro-relationship cognitions on the hurt and the relationship, we conducted multiple mediation analyses using the INDIRECT procedure by Preacher and Hayes (2008). Moreover, we examined if the pattern of results diverged as a function of whether the friend showed reconciliatory behavior using the formula provided by Paternoster, Brame, Mazerolle, and Piquero (1998). Gender (coded as female = 0, male = 1) and age were treated as covariates in all analyses. First, we briefly describe the results concerning the covariates; then we address the main results of the multiple mediation analyses.

Covariates.   Neither age nor gender significantly affected revenge motivation in both conditions ($ps > .10$). Women did show higher avoidance than men in both conditions, $\beta s > -.10$, $ps < .01$. Age was marginally related to avoidance in both conditions, $\beta s > .05$, $ps < .10$. Men showed greater benevolence than women in both conditions, $\beta s > .09$, $ps < .01$. Also, age was linked to benevolence in both conditions, $\beta s = -.13$, $ps < .001$.

The multiple mediation results concerning revenge, avoidance, and benevolence for the reconciliatory and no reconciliatory behavior conditions are depicted in Figure 1. Significance tests of the indirect effects of the mediators can be found in Table 4.

Revenge.   Victim sensitivity was significantly related to revenge motivation in the reconciliatory as well as in the no reconciliatory behavior condition, but the direct effect became insignificant (i.e., total mediation) only when reconciliatory behavior was shown. The total effect was significantly stronger when no reconciliatory behavior was shown ($p < .05$), corresponding to a moderating effect of condition.

All relationships between JS-victim and the four mediators were as expected in both conditions. The positive link between JS-victim and normative legitimizing cognitions was greater when no reconciliatory behavior was shown. In the reconciliatory behavior condition, only normative legitimizing cognitions and pro-relationship cognitions were predictive of revenge motivation. In the no reconciliatory behavior condition, only normative legitimizing cognitions were significantly related to revenge. Normative legitimizing cognitions were more strongly related to revenge in the no reconciliatory behavior condition. Likewise, the effects of mistrustful interpretations differed significantly from each other in the two conditions, but as both effects were not significant per se, this difference is not discussed further. The significant total indirect effect of JS-victim on revenge was largely driven by normative legitimizing cognitions in both conditions. In the reconciliatory behavior condition, the specific indirect effect through pro-relationship cognitions attained significance as well. The indirect effect through normative legitimizing cognitions was significantly greater in the no reconciliatory behavior condition.

Overall, marginally more variance of revenge was explained in the no reconciliatory behavior condition, as demonstrated by the
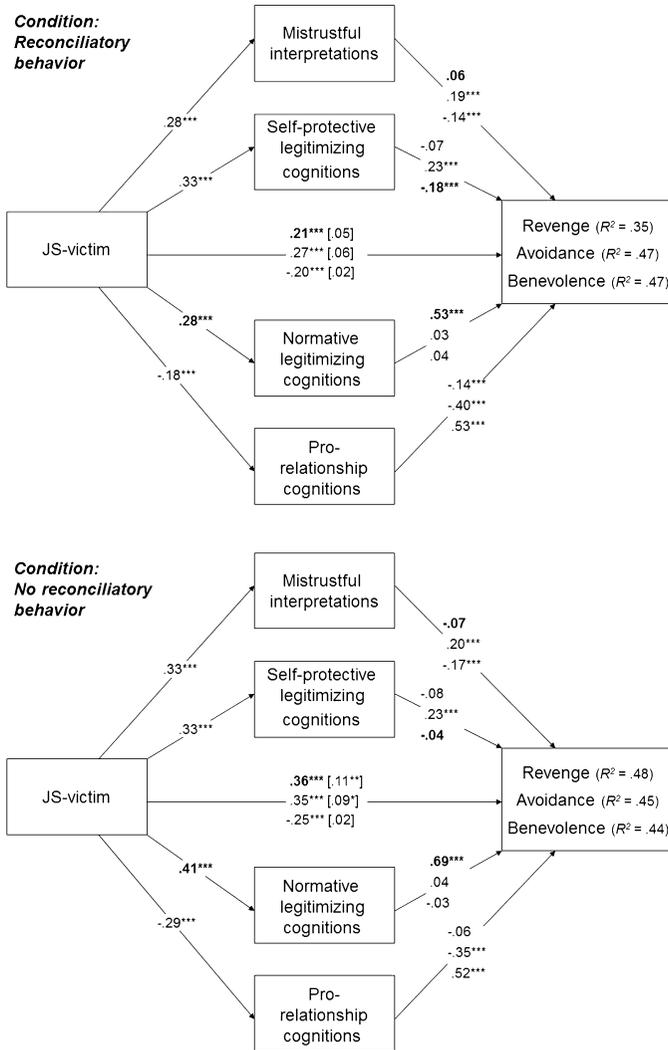
Figure 1

Study 3: Multiple mediation of the effects of JS-victim on revenge, avoidance, and benevolence via mistrustful interpretations of a friend's post-transgression behavior, self-protective and normative legitimizing cognitions, as well as pro-relationship cognitions for both conditions. All coefficients represent standardized regression coefficients while controlling for age and gender. Boldface type highlights relationships that vary as a function of the condition. *N* (reconciliatory behavior) = 487; *N* (no reconciliatory behavior) = 479. ***p < .001. **p < .01. *p < .05.

Table 4
Study 3: Magnitude and Confidence Intervals of the Multiple Mediation Effects of JS-Victim With the Four Types of Post-Transgression Cognitions as Mediators on Revenge, Avoidance, and Benevolence in Both Conditions

	Bootstrap Results for Indirect Effects					
	Condition: Reconciliatory Behavior			Condition: No Reconciliatory Behavior		
	Indirect Effect	95% CI		Indirect Effect	95% CI	
		Lower	Upper		Lower	Upper
Revenge						
Mediators						
Total indirect effect	**.17**	**.10**	**.23**	**.25**	**.17**	**.33**
Mistrustful interpretations	.02	−.008	.04	−.02	−.05	.004
Self-prot. legitimizing cognitions	−.02	−.06	.01	−.03	−.06	.0002
Normative legitimizing cognitions	***.15***	***.09***	***.21***	***.28***	***.20***	***.37***
Pro-relationship cognitions	**.02**	**.009**	**.05**	.02	−.001	.05
Avoidance						
Mediators						
Total indirect effect	**.21**	**.15**	**.27**	**.26**	**.19**	**.33**
Mistrustful interpretations	**.05**	**.03**	**.09**	**.06**	**.03**	**.10**
Self-prot. legitimizing cognitions	**.07**	**.04**	**.12**	**.08**	**.04**	**.12**
Normative legitimizing cognitions	.008	−.01	.03	.02	−.02	.06
Pro-relationship cognitions	**.07**	**.04**	**.12**	**.10**	**.06**	**.15**
Benevolence						
Mediators						
Total indirect effect	**−.18**	**−.25**	**−.11**	**−.24**	**−.30**	**−.15**
Mistrustful interpretations	**−.04**	**−.07**	**−.02**	**−.06**	**−.09**	**−.03**
Self-prot. legitimizing cognitions	**−.06**	**−.10**	**−.03**	−.01	−.04	.02
Normative legitimizing cognitions	.01	−.01	.04	−.01	−.06	.02
Pro-relationship cognitions	**−.09**	**−.14**	**−.04**	**−.15**	**−.21**	**−.10**

Note. Boldface type highlights a significant effect as determined by the 95% bias-corrected and accelerated confidence interval (95% CI). Italic type indicates that the effect differs between both conditions.

non-overlapping 90% confidence intervals (CI) of the respective R^2 of both models (no reconciliatory behavior condition: $R^2 = .48$, CI = [.42, .53]; reconciliatory behavior condition: $R^2 = .35$, CI = [.29, .41]). Overall, revenge was higher in the no reconciliatory behavior ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.06$) than in the reconciliatory behavior ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.82$) condition, $t(902) = 3.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.25$.

Avoidance. JS-victim influenced avoidance motivation significantly in both conditions. Again, only in the reconciliatory behavior condition was the mediation total, that is, no significant direct effect remained.

Interestingly, the effects of the mediator variables on avoidance were contrary to revenge, as this time normative legitimizing cognitions were not predictive of avoidance but all other mediators were in both conditions. Correspondingly, the significant total indirect effects were driven by self-protective legitimizing cognitions, mistrustful interpretations, and pro-relationship cognitions but not normative legitimizing cognitions in both conditions. There were no significant differences between both conditions.

Likewise, the R^2 in both conditions did not differ nor did the total effect. Overall, avoidance was higher in the no reconciliatory behavior ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.42$) than in the reconciliatory behavior ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.44$) condition, $t(972) = 2.70$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.17$.

Benevolence. JS-victim affected benevolence significantly in both conditions. No significant direct effects remained irrespective of whether reconciliatory behavior was displayed or not.

The pattern of results with regard to the effects of the mediators on benevolence was similar to the one concerning avoidance. Again, normative legitimizing cognitions did not affect benevolence in both conditions, in contrast to mistrustful interpretations and pro-relationship cognitions. Self-protective legitimizing cognitions influenced benevolence only when reconciliatory behavior was shown. Accordingly, the significant total indirect effect of JS-victim on benevolence was mainly driven by a lack of pro-relationship cognitions and pronounced mistrustful interpretations in both conditions. In the reconciliatory behavior condition, the specific indirect effect through self-protective legitimizing cognitions attained significance as well. Only the link between self-protective legitimizing cognitions and benevolence differed significantly as a function of whether reconciliatory behavior was displayed.

The R^2 in both conditions did not differ nor did the total effect. Overall, benevolence was lower in the no reconciliatory behavior ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.25$) than in the reconciliatory behavior ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.30$) condition, $t(972) = -4.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.27$.

As hypothesized, the associations between victim sensitivity and the different forgiveness facets were largely mediated by mistrustful

interpretations, self-protective as well as normative legitimizing cognitions, and pro-relationship cognitions. Interestingly, the pattern of mediation effects differed remarkably between the forgiveness facets. It appears that normative legitimizing cognitions are especially relevant to revenge, whereas the other three cognitive mediators—self-protective legitimizing cognitions, mistrustful interpretations, and pro-relationship cognitions—are more germane to avoidance and benevolence.

Furthermore, the perpetrator's reconciliatory behavior following the transgression attenuated victim sensitivity effects only concerning revenge motivation, whereas avoidance and benevolence were not associated differentially with victim sensitivity as a function of whether reconciliatory behavior was observable. These findings may imply that although direct punitive impulses as expressed in revenge motivation are somewhat attenuated when a perpetrator shows reconciliatory behavior—thereby partly restoring justice and signaling adherence to the "moral order"—resentfulness and grudge that are typical for individuals high in victim sensitivity may still override the appeasing influence of reconciliatory behavior, resulting in virtually unchanged high avoidant motivation and low benevolence. The fact that reconciliatory behavior somewhat attenuated the link of JS-victim with normative legitimizing cognitions, but not self-protective legitimizing cognitions, suggests that the reconciliatory behaviors exhibited by the friend perpetrator in our scenarios may not have been equally effective with regard to the issues of justice and protection of the self: Whereas reconciliatory behaviors on the side of the perpetrator may to some degree have satisfied victim-sensitive persons' genuine desire for justice, they were possibly not sufficient to allay these persons' strong concern for self-protection. In consequence, retributive impulses (as expressed in revenge motivation) aimed at restoring the moral order are diminished, but victims' motivation to keep their distance from the perpetrator (as expressed in pronounced avoidance and diminished benevolence) remains unchanged.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across three studies, drawing on three diverse samples, we examined the associations between dispositional justice sensitivity from a vic-

tim's perspective and dispositional as well as situational forgiveness. Furthermore, we identified specific cognitive mechanisms underlying the relationship between justice sensitivity and situational forgiveness and tested the moderating influence of post-transgression perpetrator behavior. Using a community sample, we established the link of JS-victim with a variety of dispositional forgiveness measures in Study 1. Results implied that being sensitive to injustice is negatively related to positive indicators of the tendency to forgive others and positively associated with vengeful and avoidant tendencies. In Study 2, we focused on situational forgiveness and confronted participants with a romantic partner's reconciliatory behavior following a relational transgression. JS-victim was positively associated with revenge and avoidance motivation and negatively associated with benevolent motivation toward one's partner, which was partially mediated by mistrustful interpretations of the partner's reconciliatory behavior. In Study 3, we focused on situational forgiveness within a friendship context. Here, we contrasted reconciliatory and nonreconciliatory post-transgression perpetrator behavior and investigated mistrustful interpretations of a friend's post-transgression behavior along with legitimizing cognitions and pro-relationship cognitions on the hurt and the victim-perpetrator relationship as possible mediators. When examining this set of mediators all together, the positive effect of victim sensitivity on revenge turned out to be solely mediated by normative legitimizing cognitions, whereas mistrustful interpretations of the friend's post-transgression behavior and pro-relationship cognitions acted as mediators with regard to avoidance and benevolence. Finally, specific legitimizing cognitions reflecting self-protective concerns acted as a mediator between JS-victim and avoidance as well as benevolence. Subgroup analyses for all paths of the model revealed that this pattern of results emerged largely independent of whether or not the friend showed reconciliatory behavior in the aftermath of the transgression in the case of avoidance and benevolent motivation, whereas revenge motivation was less strongly associated with normative legitimizing cognitions in the reconciliatory behavior condition.

As Schmitt et al. (2009, 2010) argued, justice sensitivity from the victim's perspective represents a mixture of genuine concern for justice along with intolerance regarding its violation as well as a strong motive for self-protection. Whereas the justice-related, more

moralistic concerns of a person high in victim sensitivity might be best satisfied, for example, by seeking revenge and punishing the offender, the self-protection motive is probably best served when actively avoiding the offender or cutting off at least any sort of close, warmhearted contact. Our finding that different types of legitimizing cognitions mediate the relationship of victim sensitivity with different forgiveness outcomes—with normative legitimizing cognitions mediating the JS-victim effect on revenge and self-protective legitimizing cognitions mediating the JS-victim effect on avoidance and benevolence—further corroborates the notion of victim sensitivity as an amalgam of moralistic, justice-related concerns and the need for self-protection.

Nonetheless, in our mediational analyses, JS-victim also proved to be related to a decreased likelihood of pro-relationship cognitions focusing on the value of the victim-perpetrator relationship. Value-seeking cognitions have been shown to powerfully promote forgiving (cf. McCullough et al., 2010); in the current study, our set of pro-relationship cognitions was most strongly related to victims' benevolence toward the friend perpetrator. Only recently, Burnette, McCullough, Van Tongeren, and Davis (2012) argued from an evolutionary perspective and proposed forgiveness to result from an evolved information-processing system integrating the aspects of exploitation risk and relationship value (for a similar, yet not evolutionarily derived distinction, compare Guerrero and Bachman's [2010] expectancy-value approach to forgiving and their key aspects of relational uncertainty and overall relationship quality). In that vein, victim-sensitive individuals—with their tendency to infer ulterior motives and protect the self as well as a reduced likelihood to harbor pro-relationship cognitions—could be regarded as possessing two biases in their processing of relationship-relevant information, ultimately leading to pronounced unforgiveness in the wake of interpersonal hurt. Yet, as our results imply, considerations centering on issues of justice, the necessity to teach a lesson, and the preservation of the moral order may also crucially inform the decision of whether to forgive or not, especially when it comes to revenge. These considerations are not only characteristic for persons high in JS-victim, but are rather likely to also be harbored by other individuals in the aftermath of interpersonal hurt. Thus, they lend themselves to complement information-processing approaches to forgiveness as proposed by Burnette et al. (2012) and may also prove informative

when it comes to the impact of reconciliatory behavior and other restorative measures to be taken by forgiveness-seeking perpetrators.

Finally, our studies showed that mediational results with regard to the facets of avoidance and benevolence remained virtually unchanged, no matter if the perpetrator signaled remorse or not. At first glance—given that apology and amend making have repeatedly been shown to be robust predictors of victims' forgiveness and that reconciliatory, restorative behaviors should be especially relevant to individuals high in victim sensitivity—this finding is quite surprising. On the one hand, these results may imply that the effect of victim sensitivity can barely be neutralized by perpetrator remorse, possibly due to the strong cognitive reactions prompted by transgression situations in these individuals. On the other hand, one might reconsider the fact that the experimental manipulations used within the scenario studies of the present investigation only span a limited range of reconciliatory perpetrator behaviors. First, whereas we recurred to rather direct forms of acknowledgment (i.e., asking for pardon, saying "I'm sorry") and the promise to compensate for the harm caused in our reconciliatory behavior scenarios, real-life post-transgression perpetrator communication may also entail nonverbal displays of negative perpetrator feelings (e.g., eye contact, "sad looks," hugging, crying). Importantly, these behaviors may help to amplify the emotional intensity of post-transgression perpetrator communication, thereby holding the potential to underscore the sincerity of perpetrator remorse or repentance and, furthermore, express commitment to promised amends (cf. Kelley & Waldron, 2005; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). In doing so, they might represent crucial behavioral cues in forgiveness-seeking communication. Moreover, in terms of compensation, one may also consider more "costly" apologies or perpetrator sacrifice (Ohtsubo & Watanabe, 2009; cf. Zahavi & Zahavi, 1997), which could not only help resolve issues of justice in the aftermath of interpersonal transgressions, but may also be likely to boost sincerity perceptions of perpetrator remorse. Second, one might reconsider that forgiveness is a temporally unfolding phenomenon (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003)—and so is forgiveness-related communication (cf. Waldron & Kelley, 2008). In consequence, it may well be that pronounced mistrust and concern for self-protection in victim-sensitive individuals may only be attenuated over an extended period of time, in which a truly remorseful perpetrator will repeatedly approach the victim

of the transgression with varying forgiveness-seeking behaviors, thereby gradually reassuring the victim that he or she is to be trusted. Albeit future research should address the malleability of the proposed cognitive mechanisms in light of qualitatively different and, moreover, temporally extended reconciliatory perpetrator behaviors, the present investigation moves beyond a mere trait approach and sheds light on the specific cognitive dynamics within victim-sensitive individuals in the aftermath of interpersonal harm.

Limitations and Outlook

Finally, some limitations of the present work deserve mention, which at the same time may help to identify promising approaches to future research. First, in their work in the context of experimental games, Gollwitzer and Rothmund (2009) systematically varied contextual cues by manipulating the number of violators, with some violators representing a context of considerable ambiguity, likely to prompt a suspicious mindset in persons high in victim sensitivity. In our research, focusing on the cognitive underpinnings of the JS-victim/ antisocial reactions link, we selectively chose transgression scenarios of moderate severity for our Studies 2 and 3. In the first place, we did this because moderate severity should allow for the most ambiguity with regard to the interaction partner's intentions. In the second place, extremely severe transgressions are not only a lot less ambiguous with regard to the interaction partner's malicious intentions, but also represent very special and infrequent events that might be much harder to imagine, whereas very mild transgressions that are closer to daily hassles (Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981) may actually call into question the necessity to "forgive." Nonetheless, in future work, one should systematically vary transgression severity to determine whether the influence of JS-victim does indeed only unfold within the context of moderate severity or rather generalizes to the whole severity spectrum in the context of close relationships. Besides severity, perpetrator intent and awareness of the fact that the victim would be hurt may act as variables that can be systematically varied to manipulate meanness and ambiguity of the offense.

Second, in our studies dealing with situational forgiveness, we examined reactions to a transgression committed by a romantic relationship partner as well as reactions to a transgression committed by a friend. Relations of JS-victim with forgiving motivations appeared

to be in a comparable range, suggesting that JS-victim might play an equally important role in both types of close relationships. Nonetheless, the fact that the design of both studies was not completely symmetrical (i.e., in terms of examined mediators and the experimental manipulation of post-transgression perpetrator behaviors) prevents us from drawing firm conclusions about the equivalency of the mechanisms underlying (un)forgiving reactions in romantic and friend relationships. Given that some studies suggest forgiveness is conceived of differently in the context of dating and friend relationships (e.g., Kelley, 1998; Merolla, 2008; cf. Vangelisti & Crumley, 1998) and little is known about the relative impact of the justice-sensitive disposition within varying relationship contexts, systematically comparing the mechanisms at work in dating and friend relations is a promising future endeavor for close relationship researchers.

Third, in the present investigation, we recurred to scenario methods in which participants reacted to hypothetical situations where a close other was said to have committed a wrong. Scenario methods represent an adequate design to investigate the specific cognitive reactions of participants who are confronted with standardized situational stimuli. Yet the usage of transgression scenarios may result in a slight overestimation of the impact of cognitive variables as opposed to recall methodologies, since the former emphasize cognitions, whereas the latter rather emphasize affect (cf. Fehr et al., 2010). Hence, our finding that victim sensitivity effects on forgiveness were largely mediated by cognitive variables should be interpreted with some caution and awaits further qualification in designs putting pronounced emphasis on ecological validity. In our view, the study of naturalistic forgiveness episodes not only via transgression recall approaches but also via diary/ambulatory assessment methods represents a promising avenue. In these designs, the online assessment of cognitive and affective variables becomes possible and might further inform us about the complex ways these variables relate to important outcomes such as forgiving motivations, but also specific forgiveness-associated behaviors on the victim and on the perpetrator side. When examining naturalistic forgiveness episodes, one might bear in mind that real-life post-transgression perpetrator behaviors are manifold and in some sense much richer than implied by the manipulations within the current investigation and past forgiveness research that has very much focused on specific behaviors, such as apology or amend making. As suggested by work stemming

from the field of communication research, forgiveness-seeking per-petrators may use a variety of means to reduce uncertainty about the relationship and victims' perceived likelihood of future transgress-ing. For example, perpetrators may help in making sense of the episode by providing information about the circumstances surround-ing the transgression and own motives and intentions leading to the behavior in question. Similarly, victims' sense of psychological safety can be restored when perpetrators propose new rules or boundaries for the relationship or pledge to comply with conditions set by victims in the aftermath of interpersonal hurt (Waldron & Kelley, 2008; cf. Guerrero, Anderson, & Afifi, 2007; Kelley & Waldron, 2005).

Finally, the current investigation—employing scenario methods and focusing on the aspect of forgiving motivations—cannot speak to the broader behavioral and relational implications of victim-sensitive individuals' unforgiveness. Do victim-sensitive persons only exhibit pronounced unforgiving motivations in the aftermath of interpersonal hurt, or might they also refuse actual reconciliation with their interactions partners, either as a means to restore rela-tional justice[2] or to prevent future maltreatment? Will they actually exert vengeful behavior, and if so, by which means (cf. Yoshimura, 2007)? Might they actively take steps toward increasing their sense of psychological safety, for example, by initiating "rule talk" or discussions about relationship norms and boundaries? These intriguing questions will have to be addressed in future research. Furthermore, from a dyadic and interactional point of view, one may speculate how victim-sensitive individuals' tendency to infer ulterior motives might affect their interaction partners' behavior in the course of the relationship. On the one hand, this mistrustful attitude might prove a serious barrier to the restoration of trust in the relationship. Furthermore, perpetrators may become tired of expressing their remorse and making amends after having commit-ted a wrong if their reconciliatory behavior neither promotes victims' benevolence nor diminishes victims' avoidance. In the long run, partners and friends of victim-sensitive persons might thus gradually cease to show signs of remorse after transgressions, thereby failing to weaken victims' revenge motivation and increas-

2. We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing us to this possibility.

ing the likelihood of vengeful acts, possibly ending up in a vicious cycle. On the other hand, and taking into account the transformative character of forgiveness episodes (Kelley, 1998; Waldron & Kelley, 2008; cf. Gerlach, Agroskin, & Denissen, 2012), it is also possible that it is exactly victim-sensitive persons' relative intolerance toward violations of relational norms and rules (as opposed to a "minimizing" and overly forbearant stance) that may prompt perpetrators to make up for harm caused and engage in the joint process of working through the transgression. This reasoning is in line with recent contextual approaches to close relationships (cf. McNulty, 2008; McNulty, O'Mara, & Karney, 2008), showing that in the long run, unforgiving reactions might even prove more adaptive than overly lenient or forbearant responses—presumably because they offer the opportunity to actively readdress relational nuisances and problematic interaction patterns. Dyadic longitudinal approaches tracing the development of close relationships are needed to investigate these issues.

CONCLUSION

The ones we love are the ones most likely to hurt us, and therefore, as long as we find ourselves bound to close others, the experience of relational harm has to be accepted as part of our social life. Forgiveness is a crucial capacity, enabling us to maintain relatedness in the face of injury. Some individuals will experience relative ease of forgiving, whereas others might exhibit enormous difficulty doing so. As suggested by the current investigation, individuals high in dispositional justice sensitivity from a victim's perspective are candidates likely to experience pronounced irreconcilability in the wake of interpersonal harm, which may be largely driven by specific post-transgression cognitive reactions. In illuminating the cognitive mechanisms underlying JS-victim individuals' unforgiveness, our results reach beyond a mere trait approach and provide initial insight into what might happen in the minds of victim-sensitive individuals in the wake of interpersonal transgressions. To find out what might, in consequence, happen in these individuals' relationships when trying to overcome and work through adverse interpersonal events will constitute a promising future endeavor at the intersection of personality and close relationship research.

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