Tough love: The behavior control justice motive facilitates forgiveness in valued relationships

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Abstract
When individuals in valued relationships are transgressed against, how are they able to protect the relationship while at the same time restore justice for themselves? Study 1 ($N = 137$) employed a recall design to demonstrate that when victims restore justice, the well-established association between relationship value and forgiveness can be explained indirectly through a motivation to control future behavior. Studies 2 ($N = 122$) and 3 ($N = 115$) replicated this finding using experimental designs, manipulating two distinct facets of valued relationships: the fact that they are continuing and close. There were no indirect effects for two alternative justice motives, just deserts and revenge. We discuss implications for relations between justice and forgiveness in the context of interpersonal relationships.

Valued interpersonal relationships are inherently motivating (for a review, see Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). When transgressions occur, offended partners tend to choose approach-oriented responses designed to protect the relationship from further threat—including, notably, forgiving (e.g., McCullough, Luna, Berry, Tabak, & Bono, 2010). Intriguingly, interviews conducted in stable relationships indicate that aggrieved partners also use a nonprosocial response—punishment—to regulate the relationship (Fitness & Peterson, 2008) such that forgiveness tends to follow. Related research implies that when hurt partners forego justice but still forgive, transgressors are likely to take advantage of them, such that they suffer more (e.g., McNulty, 2011).

Experimental studies (Strelan & Van Prooijen, 2013; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014) have confirmed a causal effect of punishment on forgiveness. These studies also provide evidence of the process by which punishment encourages forgiveness. Transgressions are theorized to create an injustice gap—a discrepancy between expected (fair) and actual (unfair) treatment (Worthington, 2001). Punishment reduces the gap, thereby giving victims a sense that they have restored justice, subsequently making it easier to forgive.

Relations between justice and forgiveness are now fairly well established. At the level of individual differences, victims with inclusive (rather than alienating) justice orientations are more likely to forgive (for a brief review, see Strelan & McKee, 2014). In terms of situationally derived justice effects, restorative responses to transgressions are more likely than retributive responses to result in forgiveness (Strelan, Feather, & McKee, 2008). However, while interpersonal relationships have provided the context for much of the previous research, the effect of relationships themselves on relations between justice and forgiveness has not been studied.[1] In this article, we

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1. Wenzel and Okimoto (2012) examined the effect of manipulated closeness on victims' sense of justice. However, they embedded their manipulation in a design in which the focus was on the extent to which forgiveness predicted justice.

therefore make two interrelated new contributions to understanding how valued relationships are able to persist in the face of negative partner behavior. Philosophers' ideas about punishment have greatly influenced the goals of punishment in the criminal justice context. We now apply these same goals to the interpersonal context, thereby enabling us to generate hypotheses unique to that context.

First, just as the type of punishment (retributive or restorative) has been shown to differentiate relations between justice restoration and forgiveness (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014), so too is it important to distinguish victims' motivations for restoring justice. The criminal justice literature indicates several punishment goals. However, the explicit examination of these goals within interpersonal relationships is yet to occur (but see research on a related construct, revenge, in romantic relationships, e.g., Boon, Deveau, & Alibhai, 2009, and with children, e.g., Rose & Asher, 1999). Yet, it is important to take into account punishment goals because their relative effects will be quite different, not only to the criminal justice context but also in relation to forgiveness within interpersonal relationships.

Second, we will go back further in the causal chain and demonstrate, also for the first time, that the extent to which particular motivations for justice are endorsed depends on a specific feature of interpersonal relationships: the expectation (or not) that they will continue.

Just deserts, behavior control, and revenge motives

In the retributive justice context, individuals essentially have two main goals. One is a desire to see offenders receive their just deserts (e.g., Kant, 1952). In this view, punishment of offenders should occur for its own sake; punishment is an end in itself. The other goal is utilitarian in nature (e.g., Bentham, 1962). It refers to the belief that punishment exists, in part, to deter offenders—and by extension, potential other offenders—from reoffending. In this view, the goal of retribution is future behavior control; punishment sends a message that harmful actions have aversive consequences (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008), often

with the effect of reforming offenders (e.g., Funk, McGeer, & Gollwizter, 2014). Although individuals tend to endorse behavior control as an abstract goal, when faced with an actual wrongdoing, they overwhelmingly prefer to see offenders punished so that they get their just deserts (for a review, see Carlsmith & Darley, 2008). Indeed, in the criminal justice context, future behavior control is simply a "happy by-product" of just deserts (for a discussion, see Darley & Pittman, 2003).

We must also consider a third justice-related motive: revenge. Laypeople often use the concepts of revenge and justice interchangeably (for a discussion, see Gerber & Jackson, 2013). In addition, revenge is often defined on the basis that it is a particularly personal response to transgressions, in contrast to just deserts and behavior control punishment goals, which are seen as more the preserve of a third-party, state response (for a brief review, see Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012). As such, vengeful motives may resonate even more among victims in interpersonal relationships. Thus, it is important to distinguish vengeful motivations from just desert and behavior control motives.

When individuals seek revenge, they are motivated to see another suffer because that person caused him or her to suffer in the first place; in addition, pleasure is meant to be gained from the vengeful response (for a brief review of revenge definitions, see McCullough, Kurzban, & Tabak, 2013). Certainly, just deserts also reflect a desire to see an offender suffer, negative emotions also underlie the just deserts motive, and individuals may experience some satisfaction in seeing an offender get his or her just deserts (see Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012). However, in the case of just deserts, offender suffering is meant to be commensurate with that of the victim's, with one consequence being that a victim's equal worth and standing is proved and restored (e.g., Hampton, 1988). Conversely, vengeful desires tend to be manifested in overcompensatory responding (Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011), with the aim of elevating the victim and derogating the offender (e.g., Hampton, 1988). Moreover, the emotions associated with revenge are more extreme and intense (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1996), and there is no *pleasure*

per se to be had from seeing another get their just deserts; as such, there is a moral limit to just deserts but not revenge (e.g., Vidmar, 2001). Finally, revenge is an act intended simply to cause suffering, in contrast to just deserts where there is a moral imperative that commensurate suffering should occur (e.g., Uniacke, 2000)

Getting revenge is not always the satisfactory experience that people often expect it to be (e.g., Boon et al., 2009; Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008)—except in those circumstances where revengers see clear evidence that their act has changed offender behavior (Boon et al., 2009), educated the offender (e.g., Funk et al., 2014), and/or deterred recidivism (McCullough et al., 2013). As such, a vengeful motive for punishment possesses functional properties similar to the behavior control motive. However, the overheated nature of revenge means that it often leads to a downward spiral of counterrevenge (e.g., McCullough et al., 2013; Stillwell, Baumeister, & Del Priore, 2008). Thus, while vengeance may improve victims' self-esteem (e.g., Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012), there is little evidence to suggest that vengeful desires are associated with good-quality relationships (e.g., Boon et al., 2009; McCullough et al., 2013; Rose & Asher, 1999). Thus, as we will see shortly, although revenge has the potential to improve victim esteem and educate, change, and inhibit repeat offender behavior, it does not have the same relationship-maintaining potential as the behavior control motive.

Forgiveness and valued relationships

Generally, forgiveness occurs when a victim's stance toward a transgressor shifts from negative to positive (e.g., McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). A core feature of forgiveness, and one that distinguishes it from being merely the absence of vengeful or avoidant inclinations (e.g., McCullough et al., 1997), not holding a grudge (see Thompson et al., 2005), or a coping strategy (see Strelan & Covic, 2006), is that it is approach oriented and prosocial. As such, forgiveness is said to be characterized by a suite of interrelated behaviors, cognitions, affect, attitudes,

and motivations that may be described as benevolent (e.g., McCullough et al., 1997), compassionate (e.g., Worthington, 2001), and loving (e.g., Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000).

Victims may experience forgiveness as an intrapersonal conversion, making it possible for them to forgive even if they do make offenders aware of it (e.g., Worthington, 2001). For example, sometimes it is not possible or advisable for a victim to communicate forgiveness. Even so, victims often manifest forgiveness interpersonally so that offenders become cognizant of a positive change in victims' attitude toward them (e.g., Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002).

Several different theoretical perspectives, including evolutionary (McCullough et al., 2010), interdependence (Finkel et al., 2002), and functional (Strelan, McKee, Calic, Cook, & Shaw, 2013) theories, indicate that victims' primary purpose for forgiving is to restore or maintain valued relationships. As McCullough et al.'s (2010) valued relationships model explicates, forgiving is an investment that bears fruit downstream. That is, forgiving enables victims to continue to enjoy and take advantage of the psychological and instrumental benefits associated with the relationship. Relatedly, while forgiving and reconciling are not the same things (a person may do one and not the other), McCullough (2008) argues that, for all intents and purposes, the best behavioral indicator that forgiveness has occurred is when previously conflicted individuals reconcile.

In short, a robust predictor of forgiveness is the extent to which a relationship is valued (e.g., Burnette, McCullough, Van Tongeren, & Davis, 2012; McCullough et al., 2010; for a meta-analysis, see Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). Although valued relationships are established predictors of forgiveness in their own right, they also encompass the qualities of relationships often otherwise conceptualized and measured in the forgiveness literature. For example, in most circumstances, valued relationships are also close (e.g., Karremans et al., 2011) and/or committed (e.g., Finkel et al., 2002). However, as we will see shortly, an important characteristic of valued relationships, particularly as they

relate to justice motives, is that they are self-propelling; partners want and expect them to *continue*.

Valued relationships, justice motives, and forgiveness

While people's primary motivation when punishing criminal offenders is to see them get their just deserts (Darley & Pittman, 2003), we expect the behavior control motive to play the primary role within interpersonal relationships. When victims restore justice to exert control over future behavior, they send a message that the behavior will not be tolerated, that it has aversive consequences, and that the offender should subsequently learn not to repeat it (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008). Thus, when victims enact justice for the purpose of behavior control, they are, in effect, attempting to future-proof their relationship by setting boundaries on acceptable behavior. For example, punitive responding is more satisfying for victims in interpersonal relationships when they know their offenders have learned a lesson (e.g., Funk et al., 2014; Gollwitzer et al., 2011). Given the imperative to protect a valued relationship and prevent it from being threatened again, the more valued the relationship, the more likely offended partners are to seek justice for the purpose of future behavior control.

A feature of the behavior control motive is that it is inclusive, reflecting an approach-oriented response to transgressions. It has relationship-restorative qualities, insofar as it communicates to an offender that victims have implemented the just response to deter further relationship-threatening behavior. Forgiveness is also a response with the capacity to restore relationships. Thus, the behavior control motive and forgiveness are compatible. Behavior control addresses the harm done, ensuring that justice is not (seen to be) eschewed yet carried out with the intention of protecting the relationship; forgiveness provides a way forward after the scales of justice have been rebalanced in the relationship. The behavior control motive will therefore be positively associated with forgiveness.

Relations between relationship value and just deserts and revenge motives are less discernible. On one hand, transgressions by valued relationship partners mean that shared values have been disrespected (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2010) and relationship rules broken (Finkel et al., 2002). As such, victims with valued relationships experience transgressions more keenly (e.g., Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Moreover, the moral outrage generated by an offense influences endorsement of punitive motives; more serious actions deserve more serious punishments (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008), particularly when a close other's wrongdoing is morally unambiguous (Van Prooijen, 2006). Thus, the desire to inflict commensurate suffering (just deserts) or a more toxic response (revenge) should be strong. After all, all humans have a fundamental need for justice (Lerner, 1980), borne by physiological evidence indicating that humans' instinctive response to hurt is to retaliate (e.g., Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005).

On the other hand, valued relationships have the ability to dampen punitive desires. One reason is that it is functional in nature. To the extent that close partners do enact justice-restoring responses, their methods are more likely to be constructive rather than destructive (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2012). Revenge, for example, may have deleterious downstream consequences (McCullough et al., 2013). There are also self-fulfilling reasons. For example, partners in valued relationships are motivated to attribute positive qualities to transgressing partners (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2003), make less negative attributions for the offender's role in a transgression (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998), downplay or cognitively reframe negative partner actions (Holmes & Levinger, 1994), and possess stronger emotional connections, such that they are more likely to take the transgressing partner's perspective (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998). As such, valued relationships can mitigate the moral offensiveness of transgressions, thereby reducing victim impetus to see offenders suffer.

As we have noted, victims in nonvalued relationships experience transgressions less

severely. While one might therefore expect reduced endorsement of punitive responding (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008), it is also the case in nonvalued relationships, where moral boundaries are loosened and functional imperatives are less salient, such that punitive responding is less likely to be restrained (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998).

In short, competing undercurrents within valued and nonvalued relationships converge to suggest that offended partners within valued relationships are just as likely as nonvalued relationships to endorse just deserts and revenge motives. For example, related research (Wenzel & Okimoto, 2012) found no main effect of manipulated closeness on victims' sense of justice. Furthermore, the expectation of a null relation between relationship value and just deserts and revenge motives suggests that when victims pursue justice, these motives will play no role in the extent to which valued relationships predict forgiveness.

Overview of studies

We report three studies testing a mediation model. While we included just deserts and revenge motives to discount them as alternative mediators, our focus was on the role of the behavior control motive. The main hypothesis is that, to the extent that victims are motivated to restore justice, relationship value obtains its (well-established) effect on forgiveness partly (i.e., indirectly) through the agency of the behavior control motive: People who value their relationship are motivated to restore justice in order to control future behavior, which enables forgiveness.

In Study 1, we measured relationship value. In Study 2, we explicitly manipulated a core feature of valued relationships, the fact that *continuity* is desirable and expected. In Study 3, in a boundary test of our hypothesis, we manipulated a less explicit representation of relationship value, closeness.

Study 1

Study 1 employed a correlational, survey-type design.

Method

Participants

There were 137 participants (110 women, 21 men, 6 did not specify gender; $M_{age} = 32$, $SD = 12.49$) from the general community, who described an event from their past where they had been transgressed against, and they explicitly did something to restore justice. A research assistant advertised the study (accessible online[2]) via social media. To encourage a range of responses, we provided examples of justice-restoring responses (e.g., "defriended them on Facebook"). To reassure anonymity, the only demographic information collected was gender and age. One may assume, however, that the majority of respondents were Australian.

Procedures and materials

We asked participants to remember someone with whom they were in a current ongoing relationship (e.g., partner, friend, family member) who had previously hurt them significantly. They typed the person's name in a textbox so that it automatically appeared wherever relevant thereafter.

Participants first completed the measure of relationship value using the Relationship Value Scale (Burnette et al., 2012; sample item: "Our relationship is very rewarding to me"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; 5 items; α = .88).

Next, participants described what the offending person had done and what they (the participant) in turn did to restore justice. Finally, they completed background, mediator, and outcome measures. For all studies, we averaged multi-item measures, with higher scores indicating greater endorsement.

For descriptive purposes, we measured transgression severity with the mean of responses to two items: "How upsetting were

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2. Because we conducted the studies online, we employed several items to establish that participants had engaged appropriately (true/false format), for example, "I completed the questionnaire together with someone else." We reanalyzed the data in each study after removing any participant who indicated "yes" to at least one of these items ($n < 10$ in each study). Outcomes remained the same in each study.

[X's] actions?" (1 = *not at all upsetting*, 7 = *extremely upsetting*) and "Compared with all the other hurtful events you have experienced in your life, how upsetting was this one?" (1 = *least upsetting*, 7 = *most upsetting*; $r = .56$, $p = .001$). We also measured *time elapsed since the transgression* (in days).

To establish the extent to which participants perceived that they had restored justice, we used the item "As a result of my actions justice was done" (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*).

Justice motive measures consisted of the following items: "By making things fair again with [X], I made sure that he/she … got the message that I would not tolerate that sort of behavior; … didn't do it again; … learned a lesson" (behavior control; three items; $\alpha = .81$); " … did not get away with what they did; … got what he/she deserved; … got their just deserts" (just deserts; three items; $\alpha = .80$); and "I got back at him/her" and "I got revenge on him/her" (revenge; $r = .88$, $p < .001$; 1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicated that a model in which the eight motive items loaded on three distinct factors (behavior control vs. just deserts vs. revenge) had a good fit to the data (non-normed fit index [NNFI] = 0.97, normed fit index [NFI] = 0.96, comparative fit index [CFI] = 0.98).

Forgiveness was measured by combining "I forgive him/her" with the five-item benevolence subscale of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations (TRIM) scale (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003; sample item: "Even though [X's] actions hurt me, I still have goodwill for him/her"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; six items; $\alpha = .89$).

Results and discussion

Transgression-specific variables

Participants described experiencing transgressions that included physical, psychological, and verbal abuse; sexual infidelity; dishonesty; ostracism; malicious gossip; theft; and other forms of trust betrayal and breaches of relationship-specific rules and norms. Participants' attempts to restore justice included

silent treatment, telling the offender what he/she needed to do to make amends, and expressing discontent to make the transgressor feel bad. The initial transgression experience was highly upsetting ($M = 6.34$, $SD = 0.80$). Compared to other hurtful events they had experienced in their lives, this one was moderately hurtful ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.56$). Participants reported on events that occurred between 1 day and 25 years ago. Mean time since the transgression was approximately 2 years (SD = approximately 3.5 years).[3]

Relations between relationship value, justice variables, and forgiveness

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations between key variables. It may be seen that, first, relationship value was associated with forgiveness and behavior control in the expected positive direction. Second, there was a positive relation between behavior control and forgiveness, revenge was negatively associated with forgiveness, and just deserts was unrelated. Third, participants' perception of the extent to which they had restored justice was positively associated with each of the justice motives and forgiveness. Time elapsed was unrelated to any of the main variables. Harm severity was associated with behavior control and justice restoration.

We tested the main hypothesis using bootstrapping of a multiple mediation model (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; 5,000 samples, bias corrected). Relationship value was the predictor, the three justice motives were entered simultaneously as competing mediators, and forgiveness was the outcome variable. Figure 1 illustrates the relations. Figure 1 shows that just deserts and revenge motives were unrelated

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3. We retained all participants in order to capitalize on power. Nonetheless, we also reran our analyses using only those participants who recalled an event from the past year ($n = 89$). Outcomes remained unchanged. We also tested whether time elapsed since the transgression moderated the effect of relationship value on each of the mediators and forgiveness. We employed the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 8). There was no evidence of such an effect on any of the outcome measures (all ps > .111). Even with time elapsed included in the equation, relations between relationship value, the three justice motive mediators, and forgiveness remained unchanged.

Table 1. *Pearson product moment correlations between relationship value, justice motives, forgiveness, and background variables (Study 1)*

	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Relationship value	3.49 (1.02)							
2. Behavior control motive	4.11 (1.73)	.23**						
3. Just deserts motive	3.16 (1.66)	−.05	.63***					
4. Revenge motive	2.24 (1.65)	−.09	.26***	.56***				
5. Forgiveness	3.56 (1.00)	.76***	.28***	−.05	−.19*			
6. Justice restored	3.23 (1.89)	.08	.58***	.54***	.28**	.19*		
7. Harm severity	5.71 (1.06)	−.13	−.19*	−.13	−.07	−.12	−.20*	
8. Time elapsed	731 (1,300)	−.14	.01	−.09	.08	−.08	−.08	.25**

Note. N = 137.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

to relationship value and forgiveness, whereas behavior control was significantly associated with both relationship value and forgiveness. The total effect ($TE = 0.751$, $p < .001$) of relationship value on forgiveness reduced with the inclusion of the potential mediators (direct effect, $DE = 0.691$, $p < .001$), suggesting an indirect effect of relationship value on forgiveness through the behavior control motive, (boot $B = 0.042$, 95% CI [.011, .100]), which was significant, that is, the 95% confidence interval did not straddle zero.[4]

In summary, the results support the main hypothesis. When victims restore justice, the more they value their relationship, the more likely they are to forgive, and to some degree, this relationship occurs through the agency of the behavior control motive. Just deserts and revenge motives played no role in the relationship between relationship value and forgiveness.[5]

4. Given the correlational design, we tested two alternative models. The first inserted forgiveness as the predictor variable and relationship value as the outcome variable. There was no evidence that justice motives mediated or had indirect effects. In the second alternative model, forgiveness was the mediator, and each of behavior control, just deserts, and revenge was the outcome variable. Again, there was no evidence that forgiveness mediated or had any indirect effects.

5. Given our focus on relationship maintenance processes, we employ the benevolence subscale of the TRIM as the main indicator of forgiveness. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that we also assessed the revenge and avoidance subscales of the TRIM in Study 1, and these analyses yielded results that are consistent with our theorizing. Relationship value had an indirect effect on avoidance ($TE = −1.02$, $p < .001$; $DE = −0.93$, $p < .001$) and
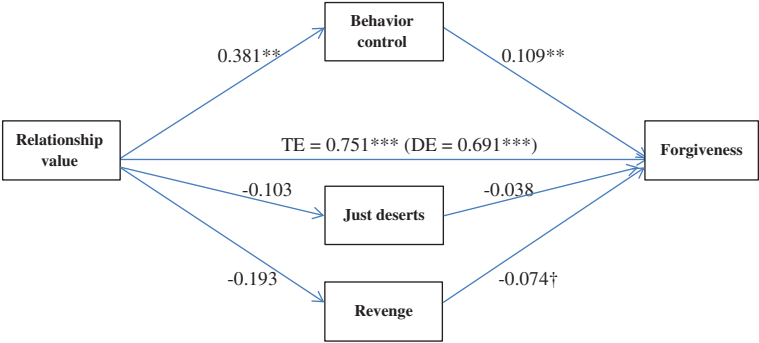
Study 2

Study 1 enabled insight into the rich and varied real-life experiences of victims of quite hurtful transgressions within interpersonal relationships. At the same time, the methodology is inherently limited; the use of a recall paradigm embedded within a correlational design precludes causal conclusions. Motivated memory is a related concern. Participants could have reinterpreted past events to feel or appear internally consistent, or fit with their current circumstances. In addition, in measuring relationship value, we cannot be completely sure that participants were necessarily responding to its inherent continuity characteristics. Study 2 employed an experimental design to address these issues. We explicitly manipulated continuity information rather than presuming it, as in Study 1.

Method

Participants

There were 122 North American participants recruited through Crowdflower (a

revenge ($TE = −0.44$, $p < .001$; $DE = −0.37$, $p < .001$) through behavior control (boot $B = −0.076$, 95% CI [−.148, −.027] and boot $B = −0.348$, 95% CI [−.083, −.007], respectively). Specifically, the motivation to restore justice for the purpose of future behavior control was associated with reduced avoidance and revenge tendencies. Additionally, neither of the just deserts or revenge motives was significantly associated with avoidance (both $ps > .139$), and both correlated positively with the TRIM revenge subscale, $r = .17$, $p = .049$ (just deserts), and $r = .36$, $p < .001$ (revenge motive).

Figure 1. Relations between relationship value, justice motives, and forgiveness (Study 1). Values are *B*.
†*p* = .07. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

labor-sourcing site similar to Mechanical Turk; 82 women, 39 men, 1 did not indicate gender; M_{age} = 37, *SD* = 11.98).

Procedures and materials

We randomly allocated participants online to one of two conditions (continuing vs. noncontinuing) in an experimental design. They read a hypothetical scenario in which a relationship partner (Sam; name chosen to allow participants to imagine a male or female partner depending on their preference) revealed that the night before, he/she had drunkenly kissed another person. Participants read that despite what happened, they were committed to continuing the relationship (*continuing*), or Sam's actions were a deal breaker, and they decided to break off the relationship (*noncontinuing*). Participants then read that after telling Sam how upset they felt, they still needed to do something to ensure that they had made things fair again between themselves and Sam.

In an attempt to standardize justice-restoring responses, participants were able to choose one of six different punishment options (derived from a content analysis of descriptions provided in Study 1): "I would give Sam the silent treatment"; "I would make Sam feel guilty and bad about what he/she has done"; "I would go out and do something similar"; "I would make it clear to Sam that he/she needs to find a way to make it up to me"; "I would tell Sam what he/she needs to do in order to make it up to me"; and "I would

make Sam worry that I might not want to see him/her again." Participants could also choose a seventh option, "Other" (and elaborated on what they would do).

Next, participants responded to justice and forgiveness measures, manipulation checks, and background items. All items are rated 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* unless otherwise indicated.

Justice motives. We used the same items as in Study 1 (with semantic variations to reflect the hypothetical nature of the transgression) for just deserts (three items; α = .72) and added one new item to the measure of behavior control ("I wanted to ensure that Sam does not jeopardize our future relationship"; four items; α = .84) and three new items to *revenge* ("I wanted to ensure that Sam … was hurt and miserable; … was treated worse than I was; … suffered more than I did"; five items; α = .84). A CFA indicated that a model in which the 12 motive items loaded on three distinct factors (behavior control vs. just deserts vs. revenge) had an acceptable fit to the data (NNFI = 0.90, NFI = 0.88, CFI = 0.93).

We measured *forgiveness* with the same six items as Study 1 (α = .92).

The manipulation *check* was "I decided to continue my relationship with Sam."

We measured justice restoration with the item "The option I chose made things fair again."

Finally, we employed several items pertaining to the ecological validity of the scenario

("The scenario was realistic"; "The options for making things fair again were realistic"; "What Sam did was hurtful") and measured perceptions of relationship value ("In this scenario I valued my relationship with Sam").

Results and discussion

Background variables

Participants agreed that the scenario ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.32$) and options for making things fair again ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.38$) were realistic and that Sam's behavior was hurtful ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 1.23$). Thus, the situation in which participants imagined themselves appears to have possessed acceptable ecological validity.

Of the options for restoring fairness, participants were most likely to indicate they would make it clear to Sam that he/she needed to find a way to make up for the behavior ($n = 27$) or that they would make Sam feel guilty and bad ($n = 23$), followed by self-generated descriptions ("Other"; $n = 19$, of which statements tended to be variations on and/or combinations of the other options and often accompanied by dissembling), making Sam worry they might not want to see him/her again ($n = 18$), giving the silent treatment ($n = 16$), telling Sam what he/she needed to do to repair things ($n = 14$), and, finally, doing something similar ($n = 4$).[6]

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6. Four of the options indicated more retributive responses (silent treatment, making Sam feel bad/guilty, making Sam worry that the participant would end the relationship, and going out and doing the same thing), while two of the options were more restorative (telling Sam what to do to repair things, making it clear Sam had to find a way to repair things). We therefore collapsed the response options into retributive ($n = 62$) and restorative ($n = 41$) categories. A chi-square analysis indicated that participants in the continuing condition were more likely to choose a restorative option, whereas participants in the noncontinuing condition were more likely to choose a more retributive option, $\chi^2(1, 103) = 14.67$, $p < .001$. We subsequently employed the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 8; 5,000 iterations; bias corrected) to test whether response options moderated effects of closeness on justice motives and forgiveness. Response options had a marginal effect on forgiveness ($B = 0.616$, $p = .065$), and there was a marginal interaction between response options and closeness on forgiveness ($B = -0.160$, $p = .090$). Response options did not have a main or interactive effect on any of the motives (all $ps > .36$).

We explored if category choice affected the extent to which participants perceived that their response had made things fair again. While the omnibus test was significant, $F(6, 114) = 2.33$, $p = .037$, post hoc analyses indicated no significant differences between categories (all $ps > .073$).

Effects of manipulated continuity

We conducted a series of independent samples t tests to test effects of the manipulation on the main and background variables. Table 2 reports the results, which are summarized below.

Manipulation check. Participants in the continuing condition were significantly more likely to agree that their relationship would continue. Thus, the manipulation was successful. In addition, participants in a continuing relationship were significantly more likely to perceive that in the scenario, they valued their relationship with Sam, even though such information had not been given to them. This finding supports the basic premise that people equate relationship continuity with being in a valued relationship.

Justice motives. As predicted, participants in a continuing relationship relative to those who decided to break off the relationship were significantly more likely to endorse behavior control but no more likely to endorse just deserts and revenge.

Forgiveness. Participants who decided to continue the relationship were significantly more likely to forgive.

Justice restoration. Participants in the continuing condition were significantly more likely to indicate that their response made things fair again.

Harm severity. Participants in the continuing condition were just as likely as those in the noncontinuing condition to perceive the event as hurtful.

Relations between continuity, justice variables, and forgiveness

Table 3 presents the zero-order correlations. It shows that behavior control was positively

Table 2. *Means and standard deviations for continuing conditions on manipulation check, justice motives, and forgiveness, Study 2 (*N = *122)*

	Noncontinuing M (SD)	Continuing M (SD)	t	p	d
Continuing manip. check	3.28 (2.09)	5.76 (1.67)	7.25	<.001	1.31
Relationship value	4.75 (1.40)	5.61 (1.37)	3.38	<.001	0.62
Behavior control motive	5.06 (1.20)	5.93 (1.01)	4.35	<.001	0.78
Just deserts motive	4.57 (1.08)	4.43 (1.31)	0.65	.52	0.12
Revenge motive	3.33 (1.24)	2.97 (1.27)	1.54	.127	0.29
Forgiveness	4.17 (1.21)	5.33 (1.03)	5.71	<.001	1.03
Justice restoration	4.44 (1.40)	4.97 (1.36)	2.11	.037	0.38
Harm severity	5.91 (1.22)	5.90 (1.34)	0.27	.98	0.01

associated with forgiveness. There were marginal relations between just deserts and forgiveness and between revenge and forgiveness. Justice restoration was positively associated with forgiveness and behavior control but this time was unrelated to just deserts and revenge motives. Harm severity was associated only with behavior control.

To test the main hypotheses, we employed the same bootstrapping procedure as Study 1, with continuity as the IV (-1 = noncontinuing, 1 = continuing). Figure 2 illustrates the key relationships. Consistent with the results of Study 1 and reflecting the *t* tests, there was no relation between either just deserts and revenge with continuity. Thus, neither just deserts nor revenge played a role in relationships between continuity and forgiveness. There was, however, a relation between behavior control and both continuity and forgiveness. Continuity caused forgiveness ($TE = 1.158$, $p < .001$; $DE = 0.884$, $p < .001$), and as predicted, there was evidence that continuity exerted a significant indirect effect on forgiveness through the behavior control motive (boot $B = 0.285$, 95% CI [.092, .578]).[7]

7. In the noncontinuing condition, participants break up with Sam. One might argue that participants could perceive that this action itself constitutes punishment, which could explain the lack of an effect for just deserts and revenge. However, note, first, that instructions to participants explicitly pointed out that they still needed to do something to make things fair again. Second, all participants had an opportunity to indicate that breaking up was punishment in itself by choosing the "Other" response. However, of the 19 participants who chose "Other," only 1 wrote that breaking up was the punishment (removing this participant did not alter results).

Study 3

Thus far, we have demonstrated that when we measure valued relationships in the context of actual transgressions, or manipulate them explicitly on the basis of their continuing properties, behavior control plays the only mediating role. Study 3 sought to provide a more stringent replication of these findings.

Relationships are psychologically valuable for many interrelated reasons. For example, they enable the sharing of both negative and positive experiences (e.g., Reis et al., 2012); validate one's world views, self-identity, and self-worth (e.g., Leary & Baumeister, 2000); allow for the expression and sharing of mutually important values and interests (e.g., Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003); and meet fundamental needs of belonging and security (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For any or all of these and other reasons, valued relationships are, in a psychological (but not necessarily physical) sense, inherently intimate (e.g., Rusbult et al., 1998). Thus, in Study 3, we manipulated a second core feature of valued relationships, that is, "closeness," to reflect the heightened psychological connection between partners in such relationships.

It is possible that in the absence of any information relating to continuity, *both* close and nonclose victims may be motivated by behavior control—that is, neither close or nonclose victims would want an offender to repeat his or her behavior. As such, manipulating closeness provides a more challenging test of the behavior control hypothesis. Study 3 asked if we only imply relationship value through perceptions

Table 3. *Pearson product moment correlations between justice motives and forgiveness (Study 2)*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Behavior control motive					
2. Just deserts motive	.18*				
3. Revenge motive	−.27**	.59***			
4. Forgiveness	.35**	−.15†	−.15†		
5. Justice restored	.27**	.14	.07	.51***	
6. Harm severity	.35**	.13	−.14	−.01	.10

Note. $N = 122$.
$†p = .10$. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.
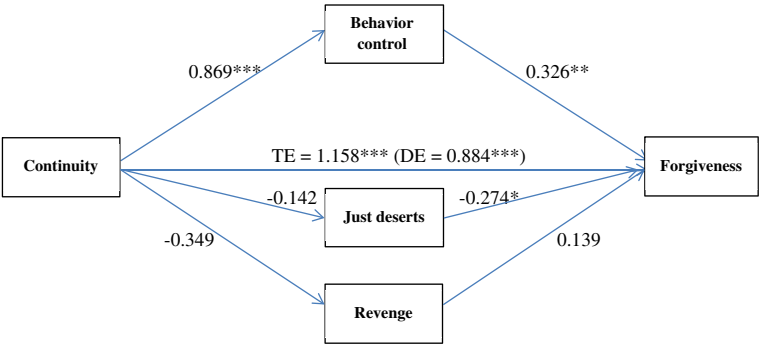
Figure 2. Relationships between continuity, justice motives, and forgiveness (Study 2). Values are *B*.
$*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

of closeness rather than explicitly measuring (Study 1) or explicitly manipulating (Study 2) it, would we still see the same indirect effect of behavior control?

Method

Participants

There were originally 117 North American participants recruited online through Crowdflower, but after screening (see below), data from 115 participants were analyzed (77 women, 38 men; $M_{age} = 38$, $SD = 12.39$).

Procedures and measures

We employed the same experimental design and scenario as Study 2, except that we replaced continuity information with closeness information (i.e., "You and Sam have become close" vs. "You and Sam are not close").

Measures were also the same, except that the manipulation check now referred to closeness, and we added a measure of the perceptions of the continuing nature of the relationship ("I am committed to continuing the relationship"). Also, the first two studies found that relationship quality did not differentiate perceived transgression severity. We wanted to confirm, however, that offended partners in valued relationships are responding to a perception that shared values and relationship rules had been broken. Thus, we developed a new three-item measure: "Sam acted contrary to the values we shared"; "Sam broke a relationship rule"; and "Sam acted contrary to how a relationship partner should act" ($\alpha = .85$).

A CFA indicated that a model in which the 12 motive items loaded on three distinct factors (behavior control vs. just deserts vs. revenge) had an adequate fit to the data (NNFI = .93,

NFI = .90, CFI = 0.95). Internal reliabilities for the measures used in analyses were αs = .69 (just deserts), .86 (revenge), .79 (behavior control), and .90 (forgiveness).

Results and discussion

Justice-restoring responses

Two participants who indicated "Other" provided frivolous descriptions of what they would do and were therefore removed from analysis (outcomes are unchanged when they are included).

Endorsement of justice-restoring responses followed a somewhat similar pattern to Study 2. Participants were most likely to indicate that they would make it clear to Sam that he/she needed to find a way to make up for the behavior ($n = 40$), followed by making Sam feel guilty and bad ($n = 17$), telling Sam what he/she needed to do to repair things ($n = 15$), giving Sam the silent treatment ($n = 14$), making Sam worry they might not want to see him/her again ($n = 13$), and, last, self-generated descriptions ("Other"; $n = 12$) and doing something similar ($n = 4$).[8]

A one-way analysis of variance indicated no difference between category choices on the extent to which participants perceived that justice had been restored, $F(6, 108) = 1.19$, $p = .32$.

Effects of manipulated closeness

Table 4 presents the results of the independent t tests.

Manipulation check. Participants in the close condition were significantly more likely than those in the nonclose condition to agree that they were close to Sam. In addition, and importantly, close participants were significantly more likely to agree that their relationship was valuable and that it would continue—despite not receiving such information. Thus, participants equated closeness with being in a valued relationship, one that would also be continuing.

Justice motives. Participants in the close condition were significantly more likely to endorse behavior control relative to those in the nonclose condition. There was no difference between conditions on just deserts and revenge.

Forgiveness. Participants in the close condition were significantly more likely to forgive than those in the nonclose condition.

Justice restoration. Participants in the close condition were marginally more likely than those in the nonclose condition to perceive that their response restored justice.

Harm severity and values betrayal. Participants in close and nonclose conditions had equivalent perceptions of the severity of the transgression. However, as expected, participants in the close condition were more likely to agree that Sam's behavior was a betrayal of shared relationship values and rules.

Relations between closeness, justice variables, and forgiveness

Table 5 presents the zero-order correlations. Again, behavior control was associated with forgiveness in the expected positive direction. Just deserts and revenge motives were unrelated to forgiveness. Justice restoration was positively associated with forgiveness and behavior control but unrelated to just deserts and revenge motives. Harm severity was associated with behavior control (positively) and also revenge (negatively) and justice restoration (positively).[9] Values betrayal was

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8. We collapsed response options into retributive ($n = 48$) and restorative ($n = 55$) responses using the same rationale as Study 2. This time, there was no relation between closeness condition and response option, $\chi^2(1, 103) = 0.06$, $p = .80$. We again used the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 8; 5,000 iterations; bias corrected) to test whether response options moderated effects of closeness on motives and forgiveness. While there was a significant interaction on revenge ($B = -1.118$, $p = .021$), there was no main effect of response options on revenge or any of the other main variables or any other interactions with closeness (all ps > .192).

9. In each study, we reran the bootstrapping analysis with harm severity as a covariate, and each time, results were unaltered.

Table 4. *Means and standard deviations for continuing conditions on manipulation check, justice motives, and forgiveness, Study 3 (*N = *115)*

	Nonclose *M* (*SD*)	Close *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*p*	*d*
Close manip. check	2.64 (1.26)	6.13 (0.85)	17.34	<.001	3.25
Relationship value	4.51 (1.24)	5.67 (1.60)	5.16	<.001	0.81
Perceived continuity	4.25 (1.83)	5.60 (1.45)	4.39	<.001	0.82
Behavior control motive	5.33 (1.23)	5.82 (0.93)	2.44	.016	0.45
Just deserts motive	4.21 (1.17)	4.27 (1.26)	0.26	.79	0.05
Revenge motive	2.97 (1.20)	2.92 (1.35)	0.21	.83	0.04
Forgiveness	4.37 (1.19)	5.10 (1.02)	3.53	.001	0.66
Justice restored	4.67 (1.32)	5.13 (1.20)	1.96	.052	0.36
Harm severity	5.83 (1.67)	6.03 (1.13)	0.92	.36	0.14
Values betrayal[a]	5.20 (1.15)	6.14 (0.85)	3.41	.001	0.93

[a]Due to an error when saving data, *n* = 54 for this measure (cell *n*s are, however, equal).

positively associated with behavior control and negatively associated with revenge motive.

To test the main hypotheses, we employed the same bootstrapping procedure as Studies 1 and 2, this time with closeness as the IV (−1 = not close, 1 = close). Figure 3 portrays the main relationships. Figure 3 shows that, mirroring Studies 1 and 2, just deserts and revenge were unrelated to both closeness and forgiveness, therefore playing no role in relations between closeness and forgiveness. Behavior control was significantly associated with both closeness and forgiveness. Closeness was associated with forgiveness ($TE = 0.727$, $p < .001$; $DE = 0.522$, $p < .001$) and exerted an indirect effect on forgiveness through behavior control (boot $B = 0.223$, 95% CI [.043, .521]).[10]

General Discussion

Valued relationships, behavior control, and forgiveness

Three studies provide consistent evidence of the role of the behavior control motive in helping to regulate valued relationships.

When transgressions occur, the more a relationship is valued or perceived as continuing or close, the more motivated offended partners are to restore justice in order to exert future behavior control. It appears that, in turn, they are more likely to forgive. Notably, previous experimental (Strelan et al., 2008; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014) and individual difference-level (see Strelan & McKee, 2014) research demonstrates that restorative (i.e., inclusive) rather than retributive (e.g., social distancing) responses and attitudes to transgressions encourage forgiveness. Our results mirror those findings, insofar as a behavioral control motive for restoring justice possesses restorative, inclusive characteristics.

In people's responses to criminal offenders, behavior control has been relegated to merely a "happy by-product" of just deserts (Darley & Pittman, 2003). These studies suggest that in the context of interpersonal relationships, the behavior control motive is more salient than what retributive justice research indicates. Indeed, the positive associations between valued relationships, behavior control, and forgiveness found in all three studies represent a notable contribution to understanding how valued relationships persist despite inevitable conflict. Forgiveness does not only occur because victims in valued relationships are motivated to inhibit their retaliatory impulses (see Rusbult et al., 1998). In addition, victims in valued relationships, including those

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10. There was no evidence in any of the studies that gender moderated the effects of closeness on any of the motives or forgiveness (all interaction *p*s > .186). In addition, when we entered gender as a covariate in the mediation analyses, all results were unchanged—if anything, there was an even stronger effect of behavior control.

Table 5. *Pearson product moment correlations between justice motives and forgiveness (Study 3)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Behavior control motive						
2. Just deserts motive	.14					
3. Revenge motive	−.15	.52***				
4. Forgiveness	.43***	.05	.06			
5. Justice restored	.36**	.09	−.04	.41***		
6. Harm severity	.37**	−.03	−.28**	−.05	.18*	
7. Values betrayal[a]	.48***	.09	−.44***	.01	.15	.60***

Note. $N = 115$.
[a]Due to an error when saving data, relations for this variable are based on $n = 54$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.
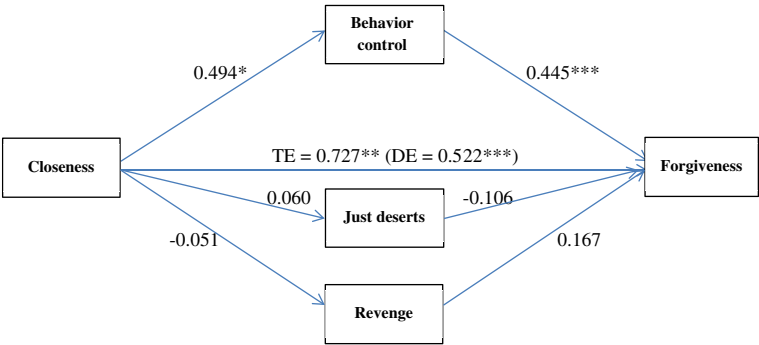
Figure 3. Relation between closeness, justice motives, and forgiveness (Study 3). Values are *B*.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

operationalized as exclusively continuing and exclusively close, do pursue justice (e.g., Fitness & Peterson, 2008) but are motivated to use justice in an approach-oriented manner. That is, they utilize justice to help maintain relationship boundaries. Justice that is motivated by a desire to control future behavior sends a message that the relationship is important and that justice is therefore necessary to ensure that the transgression (and future other transgressions) is not repeated; otherwise, the relationship will be further jeopardized.

Importantly, the level of transgression hurt was the same for both valued and nonvalued participants (including when relationship value was operationalized on the basis of its continuing and close qualities). Thus, we can discount reduced levels of harm severity as an alternative explanation for why relationship

value (and continuity and closeness) predicted behavior control. In addition, the transgressions in all three studies were reported as highly hurtful; thus, the relationships cannot be explained as simply a function of benign events.

Just deserts and revenge motives

As expected, across the three studies, valued relationships (and the derivations of continuity and closeness) did not differentiate between just deserts and revenge motives. We have argued that these null relations eventuate because of a canceling-out effect. Transgressions have a greater impact on partners in valued than nonvalued relationships because they communicate disrespect of shared values and relationship rules (see Study 3). However, while victims might subsequently respond

more punitively, in valued relationships, such actions are restrained by rationalizing impulses motivated by the relationship itself. At the same time, the loose bonds that characterize less valued relationships may allow more punitive responding in those relationships. As a result, just deserts and revenge motive endorsements end up converging regardless of relationship value (or continuity or closeness).

It may also be noted that in the multiple mediation models where relationship value and continuity were made explicit (see Figures 1 and 2), the *B*s for revenge (although non-significant) were not insubstantial and clearly higher than those for just deserts. Taken at face value, they are consistent with theorizing about just deserts and revenge, which is that the latter reflects a more personal response to hurt, whereas the former is more the preserve of the state (Zdaniuk & Bobocel, 2012). Finally, it is relevant that the more participants believed the transgression represented a betrayal of shared values (Study 3), the more they endorsed the behavior control motive and the less they endorsed revenge—whereas just deserts was unrelated to betrayal of values. Taken together, the results for just deserts may indeed reflect a reality. That is, the idea of a person getting his or her just deserts resonates less with hurt partners in interpersonal relationships.

At one level, revenge has been shown to possess functionality similar to behavior control; it can deter future behavior (McCullough et al., 2013), often because it educates and reforms offenders (e.g., Funk et al., 2014). Yet, at another level, revenge is very different to behavior control. There is a toxic intent underlying revenge (i.e., revengers seek pleasure from harming another), whereas the behavior control motive is approach oriented, seeking to include rather than alienate offenders. Accordingly, revenge has a well-established capacity to destabilize rather than restore relationships (e.g., Stillwell et al., 2008), particularly valued ones (McCullough et al., 2013). The present studies provide further evidence of the negative effects of revenge in relationships. As predicted, justice-restoring responses motivated by revenge were negatively associated (in Studies 1 and 2) or not associated (Study

3) with a relationship-restoring response, forgiveness. In contrast, the behavior control motive was positively associated with forgiveness in all three studies.

Limitations and future research

Because null hypotheses should be subject to greater empirical scrutiny, we remain cautious about the findings for just deserts and revenge motives. We look forward to other studies testing the limits of these findings, for example, by contrasting transgressions within interpersonal and criminal justice contexts.

In particular, in the criminal justice system, people readily embrace behavior control as an abstract goal, but when faced with the actuality of punishing, they are overwhelmingly more likely to be motivated by just deserts. These differential relationships exist because people use behavior control to justify the outcome of a punishment but use just deserts as a response to the offender's deservingness of a punishment (for a review, see Carlsmith & Darley, 2008). Thus, on one hand, it is possible that if we had manipulated transgression severity (for example), we may have found that the just deserts motive was more likely to have been endorsed for more severe transgressions rather than the behavior control motive. On the other hand, valued relationships can encourage illusory perceptions of partners and their behaviors so as to reduce the perceived moral offensiveness of a transgression (e.g., Murray et al., 2003). Moreover, relations between harm severity and behavior control in these studies were mixed. In Study 1, greater harm severity predicted less endorsement of behavior control (consistent with findings in the criminal justice context), but in Studies 2 and 3 (which possess higher internal validity but admittedly reduced external validity), harm severity was associated with increased endorsement of behavior control (thereby contradicting the idea that behavior control is less likely to be relevant when the moral properties of an offense are taken into account). It is also notable that harm severity was unrelated to just deserts in all three studies. Either way, future studies should manipulate both relationship value and the perceived deservingness of

a punishment so as to provide a more nuanced understanding of when behavior control and just deserts motives may be relevant within interpersonal relationships.

Despite the consistent relations between relationship value (and continuity and closeness) and the justice motives, there are some relations between the justice motives themselves, with justice restoration and with forgiveness, that require comment.

First, just deserts and revenge motives are well correlated (positively) in all three studies. In Study 1, behavior control is positively related to just deserts (relatively strongly) and revenge (relatively weakly). However, in Study 2, behavior control is weakly correlated with just deserts (positively) and revenge motives (negatively), and in Study 3, it is not at all related to just deserts and revenge motives.

Second, while behavior control is positively correlated with justice restoration in all three studies, just deserts and revenge are associated (positively) with justice restoration only in Study 1; in Studies 2 and 3, there are no significant associations. Third, albeit peripherally but suggestive for the current discussion (and as noted above), harm severity is negatively linked to behavior control in Study 1 but positively associated in Studies 2 and 3.

When these disparate findings are considered together, one pattern is evident. When recalling an actual hurtful event by someone with whom they are still in contact, participants tended to equate the three justice motives with each other and with restoring justice. Such relationships may be reflective of the messiness and noise of the "real world" captured by the Study 1 paradigm; that is, people's motives for restoring justice do overlap (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008), but when participants imagine a hurtful event by a hypothetical other—and are therefore, by definition, more removed from the press of a situation—they seem more able to disentangle justice restoration for the purposes of behavior control from just deserts and revenge. Moreover, the consistent relations between behavior control and justice restoration are in line with our theoretical model, which is that the behavior control motive is the more important motive

underlying justice restoration in the context of valued relationships.

Methodological considerations

The generally null relations for just deserts and revenge motives serve to highlight the strikingly consistent findings for the behavior control motive. Even when relationship value was operationalized less explicitly as closeness, behavior control was still the only conduit between relationship value and forgiveness. Moreover, these relationships were found across two different paradigms. Participants free-recalled actual transgressions (Study 1) and responded to standardized hypothetical transgressions (Studies 2 and 3). The advantages of each approach cancel out their respective shortcomings. The recall correlational nature of Study 1 may have reduced internal validity, but this paradigm also provides access to experiences with strong personal relevance, making it rich in ecological validity. Studies 2 and 3 were necessarily constrained because the transgression was hypothetical but, through experimental manipulation, separated out continuity and closeness in a way that seemed improbable otherwise and standardized the transgression, thereby maximizing internal validity. In addition, they allowed for somewhat more standardized justice-restoring responses.

Conclusion

While confirming that perceptions of restored justice are associated with forgiving (see Strelan & Van Prooijen, 2013; Wenzel & Okimoto, 2014), the present research provides evidence of the motivational processes that enable victims to pursue justice while still preserving a valued relationship. Justice restoration may serve an approach-oriented function and one that goes beyond merely reducing the injustice gap. That is, just as people may take a utilitarian perspective in the criminal justice system and punish to deter future offending, victims may act justly in order to future-proof valued relationships. In short, valued relationships encourage a primarily constructive motivation to restore justice, which in

turn enables a relationship-restoring response, forgiveness.

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