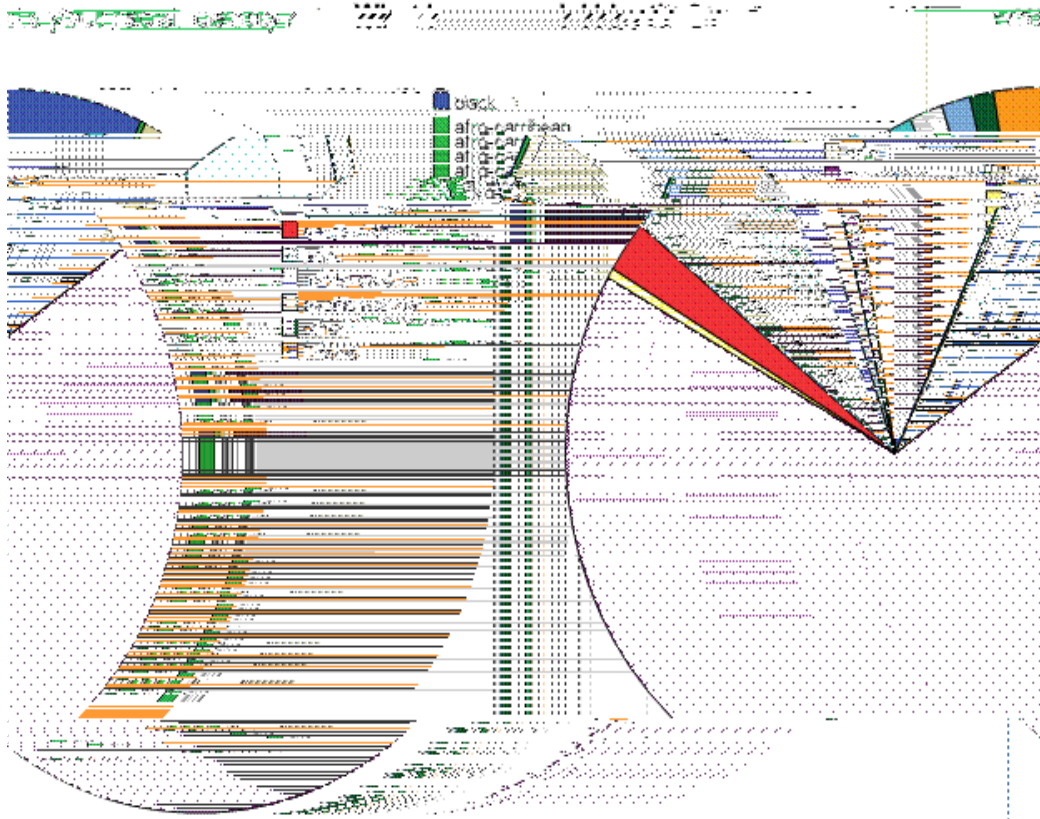


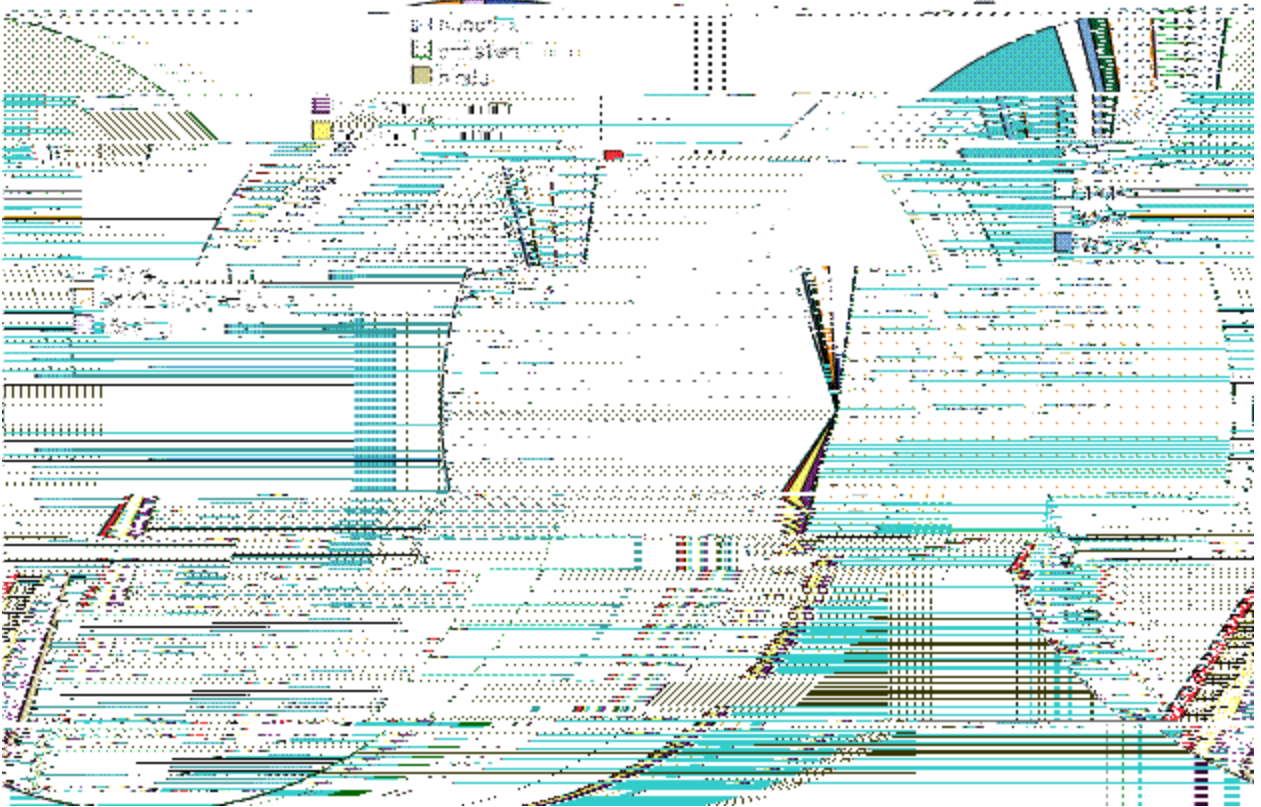
Perceptions in Close Relationships Study

There is a growing body of literature that explores the process of forgiving others (e.g., Fincham, 2000; Maio et al., 2008), but less is known about the process of self-forgiveness in relationships.



More than half of the sample (53%) were Christian, 2.1% were Buddhist, 2.1% were Muslim, 0.5% were Hindu, 0.5% were Wiccan, 0.9% were other (e.g., Pagan), and 35.9% were non-religious.

What is your religious affiliation?



The respondents were a relatively well educated group; 39.7% had completed high school or any educational level. Income was distributed bi-modally in the study. A significant proportion of people earned less than CAD\$40,000 (56.5%) or over CAD\$100,000 (17.8%).

Most of the participants were living in Canada (47%) or the US (44.9%), and had been born in Canada (38.3%), or the US (42%). Of those not born in Canada or the US, the majority were born in Europe, Mexico, or Asia. English was the first language for a majority of our participants (84.3%).

Of the 427 participants, 60.4% were in a romantic relationship, 34.9% were not, and 4.7% did not indicate whether they were in a relationship.

Friendship and Forgiveness

Friendships were generally moderately satisfying relationships.

People wrote about all kinds of situations ranging from relatively minor incidents that were quickly forgotten to more significant situations that resulted in the end of the friendship. On a rating scale of 1 – 5 of how serious the offence was, the average score was 2.62, which is just

situations were moderately serious and more serious than the things they described in their friendships.

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and cross-

causal conclusions about this finding. However, we could speculate that when individuals feel as though their friend has forgiven them for a transgression, individuals feel happier about the relationships, but conversely, when individuals are less forgiving of themselves they either value the friendship more, or perhaps behave in ways to make up for their transgressions thus resulting in more satisfying relationships. Of course, we could also speculate that when people are in more satisfying relationships, they are more likely to receive forgiveness from the friend for the transgression, and that when a relationship is highly prized, people may find it harder to forgive themselves for hurting the valued friend. There is also a slightly more troubling possible explanation for the finding that greater self-forgiveness is associated with less relationship satisfaction. It may be that people who find it easier to forgive themselves are more likely to continue to transgress against a relationship partner thus resulting in relationships of lower quality. Only research that follows people over time and collects multiple assessments about the quality of their relationship and forgiveness will be able to help us disentangle the question of causality.

How is forgiveness related to romantic relationship satisfaction?

As in the friendship domain, self and other-forgiveness were moderately correlated ($r = .47, p < .05$), and only other-forgiveness was correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .47, p < .05$).

simultaneous predictors, only other-forgiveness was related to life satisfaction and general health; self- and other-forgiveness were negatively related to depressive symptoms. That is, more self and other forgiveness was related to less depressive symptoms. Thus, it appears that in the context of our most important close relationships in adulthood, romantic partnerships, both self and other forgiveness are important.

What about general perceptions of other and self-forgiveness?

We asked participants to tell us not only about forgiveness in relation to specific incidents in their lives, but also the degree to which they generally felt forgiveness towards others and towards themselves. In the specific scenarios, we did not ask about how much participants experienced feelings of forgiveness towards their friend and partner.

There is a growing literature linking forgiveness of others to better relationship and health outcomes. For example, feeling less anger hostility and desire for revenge, and no longer

with more satisfying and stable relationships, less conflict in relationships, and fewer depressive symptoms and better physical health.

There is much less information available about tendencies for self-forgiveness and we speculated that self-forgiveness might confer many of the same benefits as forgiving others. In our study, only general self-forgiveness was related to greater romantic and friendship relationship satisfaction, and less depressive symptoms; general self forgiveness and forgiveness of others were both related to better general health and higher life satisfaction.

What are the next steps with this study?

We have only just begun to analyze the data for this project. We will continue to examine other research questions in this data set and we plan to present the findings at conferences and submit written manuscripts for publication. One of the tasks ahead will be to examine the written descriptions of the situations that the participants described and determine if there are specific qualities of the events that play a role in self- and other-forgiveness.

This study is an important first step in understanding the role of self-forgiveness in romantic and friend relationships. However, future study that assesses perceptions from both members of a couple, and follows people over time to collect multiple waves of data will be crucial to understanding the causal links between these variables. We are in the process of completing a study of married couples who have provided data for three years, including assessment of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, so we will be able to begin examining these critical questions in the near future. Check back at our webpage for future updates on this and other research in our lab.

A sincere thank you to all the participants in this study! Without your willingness to take time out of your schedules to complete these questionnaires, we would not be able to continue our work.

Best,

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