RESEARCH PAPER

Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Affect and Beliefs

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Abstract Forgiveness and gratitude are positive psychological characteristics that are connected to well-being. This study examined these connections in an understudied population of psychotherapy outpatients and examined the extent to which affect and beliefs mediated these relationships. Participants were 72 outpatients who completed a battery of assessments as part of a standard intake protocol. Results showed that forgiveness and gratitude were both positively and strongly associated with well-being and largely, though not completely, mediated by affect and belief. Forgiveness and gratitude may have an important place in the positive psychologist's repertoire of well-being enhancing techniques and exercises in general, and may be particularly powerful with a clinical psychotherapy population.

Keywords Forgiveness · Gratitude · Happiness · Life-satisfaction · Mediators · Well-being

1 Introduction

Forgiveness and gratitude can be classified as human strengths and virtues (Peterson and Seligman 2004). While some have emphasized a distinction in what constitutes forgiveness versus gratitude (Peterson and Seligman 2004), there is much that they have in common.

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A central connection between these two constructs is the human relationship where individuals experience both help and harm (Bono and McCullough 2006). It is the investigation of forgiveness and gratitude as tendencies to react to helps and harms in a positive, pro-social way, that is the first aim of this study, especially as these responses to interpersonal events are linked to enhanced levels of well-being. Our second aim is to examine possible explanations for why forgiveness and gratitude are linked to well-being. We consider two possibilities. First, forgiveness and gratitude may be associated with positive changes in affect. Second, forgiveness and gratitude may be associated with positive changes in cognitive beliefs. In either case, we examine the extent to which these changes explain the associations between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being.

1.1 Definition of Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been defined in a multitude of ways. The specific aspect of forgiveness that is focused on can often be used to classify these definitions. For instance, some definitions focus on dispositions toward forgiveness (Berry et al. 2005; Brown 2003; Thompson et al. 2005), while others focus on occasion- or relationship-specific unforgiving motivations (McCullough et al. 1998). Still other ways of defining forgiveness have taken a more taxonomic approach and consider a broad array of targets and types of forgiveness (Toussaint and Webb 2005). The Foundation for Inner Peace (1975), Jampolsky (1979, 1999) and Friedman (1989, 2000) use seven criteria for defining forgiveness: (a) a shift in perception and vision, (b) a shift in beliefs and attitudes, (c) a shift in affects, (d) a shift in self-empowerment and self-responsibility, (e) a shift in choice, decision and intention, (f) a shift from duality consciousness to oneness consciousness, and (g) a shift in the recognition of the core qualities of a person. From this perspective forgiveness occurs when a person lets go of emotionally backed judgments, grievances, attack thoughts and beliefs toward themselves and others so that they can perceive the goodness, worth, magnificence, innocence, love, and peace in both themselves and another person simultaneously. Moreover, from this point of view the forgiveness process is activated when a person makes a conscious choice/decision to forgive (see things differently) and then turns the forgiveness process over to a higher power/Self (e.g. the Holy Spirit). During this process projections are owned and released and peace and love are set as goals. Recently, Worthington and Scherer (2004) have somewhat echoed the Foundation for Inner Peace, Jampolsky, and Friedman and distinguished between emotional and decisional forgiveness. Emotional forgiveness is rooted in a subset of negative emotions including but not limited to: resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, etc. According to Worthington and his colleagues (Worthington and Wade 1999; Worthington et al. 2001) forgiveness acts through the displacement of unforgiveness or the "contamination" of unforgiveness with forgiveness or positive, pro-social, love-based emotions. Decisional forgiveness, on the other hand, is based in one's beliefs about future interactions with a transgressor. Worthington and Scherer point out that emotional and decisional forgiveness may go hand-in-hand or may diverge in interesting ways. For instance, while decisional forgiveness might often precede emotional forgiveness and actually facilitate it, this does not have to always be the case.

We agree fully with Worthington and his colleagues about the importance of emotions in forgiveness. We define emotional forgiveness as the extent to which negative emotions such as anger, fear, hurt, and bitterness can be replaced with more positive emotions such as peace, love, and joy. These emotions could be self- or other- focused. While Worthington and Scherer (2004) define decisional forgiveness as a cognitively mediated

behavioral intention statement regarding interpersonal interactions, we believe that decisional forgiveness may also involve beliefs about oneself. That is, decisional forgiveness may involve behavioral intentions regarding future interactions with a perceived transgressor as Worthington and Scherer point out, but it may also include beliefs about the worthiness and goodness of the victim. In other words, beliefs about oneself as a perceived victim may be equally important as beliefs about how interactions with the perceived transgressor should unfold in the future.

1.2 Definition of Gratitude

Gratitude has been no less of a challenge than forgiveness to define. McCullough et al. (2002) initially defined the disposition toward gratitude "as a generalized tendency to recognize and respond with grateful emotion to the roles of other people's benevolence in the positive experiences and outcomes that one obtains" (p. 112). Later, Emmons and McCullough (2003) noted broader conceptualizations of gratitude as "an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait, or a coping response" (p. 377). Consistent with this broader conceptualization, Emmons and McCullough also noted that gratitude has cognitive and emotional components. Watkins et al. (2003) have chosen to focus on grateful traits and define the grateful disposition as one that predisposes an individual to experience this state. Watkins et al. define grateful affect as Guralnik (1971) does which is "a feeling of thankful appreciation for favors received" (p. 327). Though Watkins et al. agree with Guralnik's definition, they further identify four key characteristics of grateful persons. First, grateful individuals feel a sense of abundance. Second, grateful individuals appreciate contributions of others to their well-being. Third, grateful individuals appreciate the simple pleasures of life—those readily available to most people. Fourth, grateful individuals recognize the importance of experiencing and expressing gratitude.

Friedman (1989, 2000) defines gratitude as being thankful for: (a) people, situations, and circumstances in life, (b) what you have received, experienced, and learned, (c) spiritual source/resources within, (d) abundance within, (e) what you give and forgive, (f) your inner qualities, and (g) future positive experiences, prosperity, and blessings. The Foundation for Inner Peace (1975) defines gratitude similarly to much of the above but emphasizes that it is unnecessary for the grateful person to experience anything external from another person in order to feel thankful/grateful or even blessed. We generally agree with these approaches to defining gratitude and have formerly defined gratitude (Friedman and Toussaint 2006b) in a way that focuses on the inner emotional experience and the cognitive-attitudinal belief set.

1.3 Definition of Well-Being

The meaning of happiness has been a topic of discussion since the time of the ancient Greeks and continues to receive a good deal of attention today in a variety of disciplines. Though the term "happiness" is commonly used so are a number of other related terms such as: "well-being," "subjective well-being," "quality of life," "life-satisfaction," among others. Recently, Sirgy et al. (2006) have reviewed the history, present status, and future directions of work related to happiness in sociology, psychology, economics, and medicine. Our conceptualization of well-being lies close to the notion of "subjective well-being" frequently discussed in psychology and we refer to it generally as "well-being."

There are a number of ways of defining well-being. Some of the earlier definitions in psychology and sociology focused on well-being as the ultimate goal of life (Bradburn 1969; Fordyce 1988). These definitions also tended to focus on the affective nature of well-being, and Bradburn is often credited for initially demonstrating the relative independence of positive and negative affect in a general population sample. He further showed that it was the critical balance between positive and negative affect that was an important component of well-being. Research has also shown that in addition to the importance of positive and negative affect, an independent aspect of well-being is cognitive evaluations (Pavot and Diener 1993; Sirgy et al. 2006). This tripartite model of well-being has enjoyed much support and popularity, and while other conceptualizations of well-being have also been considered (Friedman 1989; Ryff 1995; Ryff and Keyes 1995), few appear to have been as widely accepted.

Though our review is not intended in any way to be exhaustive, it is meant to convey the sense that well-being is comprised of multiple dimensions. Under these circumstances we believe that well-being should be defined and measured in a multifaceted fashion. To that end, we include measures representing each of the three components of the tripartite model: positive affect, negative affect, and cognitive evaluations.

1.4 Theoretical and Empirical Research on Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Well-Being

Theoretical work supports the notion that forgiveness and gratitude are connected with enhanced well-being, and this connection is likely mediated by cognitive-affective changes (Emmons and McCullough 2003; Friedman 1989, 1992; McCullough et al. 2002; Worthington and Wade 1999; Worthington et al. 2001). Empirical work on forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being is also growing rapidly and generally supports the conclusion that these constructs are positively associated (for reviews see Bono and McCullough 2006; Friedman and Toussaint 2006b; Toussaint and Webb 2005). However, it is interesting that forgiveness and gratitude have been captured under the umbrella term of "positive psychology" variables, as has well-being, but relatively little research has been conducted with the central focus of examining the connection between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being. Rather, many research investigations have shown that forgiveness and gratitude are negatively associated with negative states such as depression and anxiety. In other words, with few exceptions (Krause and Ellison 2003; Rye et al. 2001; Toussaint et al. 2001; Watkins et al. 2003; Emmons and McCullough 2003) the majority of the research seems to focus on the potential for forgiveness and gratitude to prevent the negative instead of promote the positive side of life. Even when positive well-being outcomes are included they have tended to be measured in very limited ways. For instance, Toussaint et al. measured well-being with a single item and often well-being is measured using one instrument with little more than three to five items assessing a single affective or cognitive domain (e.g., Krause and Ellison 2003; Sastre et al. 2003).

Sastre et al. (2003) and Maltby et al. (2005) provide examples of work where the examination of well-being was a central focus. Sastre et al. (2003) examined forgiveness and well-being in 1002 adolescents and adults from France and Portugal. They assessed forgiveness using the Forgiveness Questionnaire, an 18-item instrument assessing three dimensions of forgiveness including: (a) enduring resentment, (b) sensitivity to circumstances, and (c) overall propensity to forgive or avenge. They assessed well-being using the French adaptation of the satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al. 1985; Blais et al. 1989). Results showed a complex pattern of associations that depended on the dimension of forgiveness being considered, the sample (France vs. Portugal), and other demographic

characteristics (e.g., sex, age, religiosity). Generally, they found associations between forgiveness and well-being that ranged between .13 and .35 in absolute value. Eight out of forty-eight correlations were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. Sastre et al. pose an interesting and important question in discussing their findings, "Why are forgivingness and satisfaction with life so weakly linked?" (p. 331). They argue that satisfaction with life may be a self-referential trait that is, like many other self-referential traits such as self-esteem and loneliness, not connected to dispositions toward forgiveness. However, there are at least two other possibilities that exist to explain these findings. First, the sample employed in this study was drawn from the general population and levels of well-being were reportedly on the higher side in both samples (average 3.5+; scale = 1–5). This may have created a restriction of range in the well-being outcome and also opens the question of how important transgression resolution may have been given their high levels of well-being. Second, they rely solely on the satisfaction with life scale as their only outcome measure of well-being. While this is one of the most widely used measures of well-being and it has been shown to be highly reliable and valid, it is also quite limited in its assessment of well-being, in that, it assesses only cognitive judgments of life satisfaction. Hence, it may be the case that forgiveness and well-being are associated at stronger levels but that Sastre et al. were unable to detect these relationships due to sample or measurement limitations.

The second study that provides an example of work where the central aim was to understand the role of forgiveness in well-being is that of Maltby et al. (2005) study of forgiveness and hedonic (short term) and eudaimonic (long term) happiness. In this study 244 college students from the United Kingdom were assessed using the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (Subkoviak et al. 1995), the Depression-Happiness Scale (Joseph and Lewis 1998; McGreal and Joseph 1993), and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire—Short Form (Hills and Argyle 2002). The Depression-Happiness Scale served as the measure of hedonic happiness and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire—Short Form served as the measure of eudaimonic happiness. The Enright Forgiveness Inventory contains subscales that assess dimensions of positive and negative affect, behavior, and cognition. Results showed that associations between forgiveness and both types of happiness ranged from .26 to .35 in absolute value. All of the 12 correlations between forgiveness and happiness were significant at the $p < .01$ level. Unlike the results of Sastre et al. (2003), these findings show a small to moderate association between forgiveness and short- and long-term happiness. Further, partial correlation analyses showed that negative forgiving cognitions were uniquely associated with short-term happiness and both positive forgiving affect and forgiving behavior was associated with long-term happiness. Though Maltby et al. focus intently on the differential between hedonic and eudaimonic happiness and its correlates with forgiveness, it is also possible to re-conceptualize the measures they employed as measures of two different domains of well-being. That is, the measures used by Maltby et al. could be taken as measures of affect (Depression-Happiness Scale) and cognition (Oxford Happiness Questionnaire—Short Form). With this alternative conceptualization in mind, it appears that forgiveness is associated with affective components of well being, as well as, cognitive. It is important to point out, however, that the Enright Forgiveness Inventory focuses exclusively on event or relationship specific transgressions while the measure used by Sastre et al. (2003) assessed willingness to forgive which is more akin to dispositional forgiveness. Hence, differences in the association between forgiveness and well-being across these two studies may reflect differences in the assessment of forgiveness. That is, the possibility exists that dispositional forgiveness is not as strongly linked to well-being as event- or relationship-specific forgiveness.

Examples of gratitude studies that have had well-being as a central focus also exist. In a series of four studies utilizing almost 775 college student participants, Watkins et al. (2003) showed moderate to strong associations between affective and cognitive components of well-being and gratitude. They also demonstrated statistically significant and moderate size effects of gratitude manipulations on affective measures of well-being. In these studies, Watkins et al. used the Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test, a measure they developed to assess three different dimensions of grateful dispositions including: (a) sense of abundance, (b) simple appreciation, and (c) appreciation of others. Well-being was measured in a comprehensive fashion by assessing affective and cognitive components of well-being.

Other studies have also been aimed at examining the connection between gratitude and well-being. In a series of four studies utilizing 1,622 participants, McCullough et al. (2002) demonstrated statistically significant, moderate-to-strong associations between gratitude and well-being across three independent samples. They assessed gratitude using the Gratitude Questionnaire, a measure they developed to assess dispositional gratitude. They assessed well-being using a measure of life satisfaction and a measure of subjective happiness. In another set of studies, Emmons and McCullough (2003) examined the causal effect of gratitude on well-being using 432 participants. They found that, generally speaking, gratitude caused increases in well-being. Gratitude manipulations were straightforward and simple (e.g., think of five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for). Assessment of well-being included affective and cognitive components. Interestingly, some manipulations and samples showed different patterns of gratitude effects on affective and cognitive well-being. For instance, gratitude manipulations did not always produce increases in positive affect in college students but appeared effective in a sample of individuals with neuromuscular diseases.

To summarize, beginning theoretical and empirical work point to an important connection between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being. With the exception of the studies reviewed above, to our knowledge, few other studies have had as a central focus the examination of these connections. Further, few studies, if any, have attempted to understand what factors account for the associations between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being. Hence, there is much work to do in this area.

1.5 Present Study

The extant literature shows that forgiveness and gratitude have positive associations with well-being. While encouraging, there is a great deal of variability in the reported associations (rs = .20–.60). This has been especially true of work connecting forgiveness and well-being. We argue that the links between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being are likely to be consistently stronger than what has been previously documented, and that existing work has approached the examination of this association from a limited perspective. We extend this limited approach in three important ways. First, we consider both dispositional forgiveness, unforgiving motives (revenge and avoidance), and gratitude in the same sample and include an examination of forgiveness of oneself, a dimension of forgiveness all but ignored in current work. Second, we consider assessments of well-being representing each part of the tripartite model including: positive affective, negative affect, and cognitive evaluations. Third, we investigate the association between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being in a sample of clinical outpatients. This should allow us to examine the association in a sample that has two unique
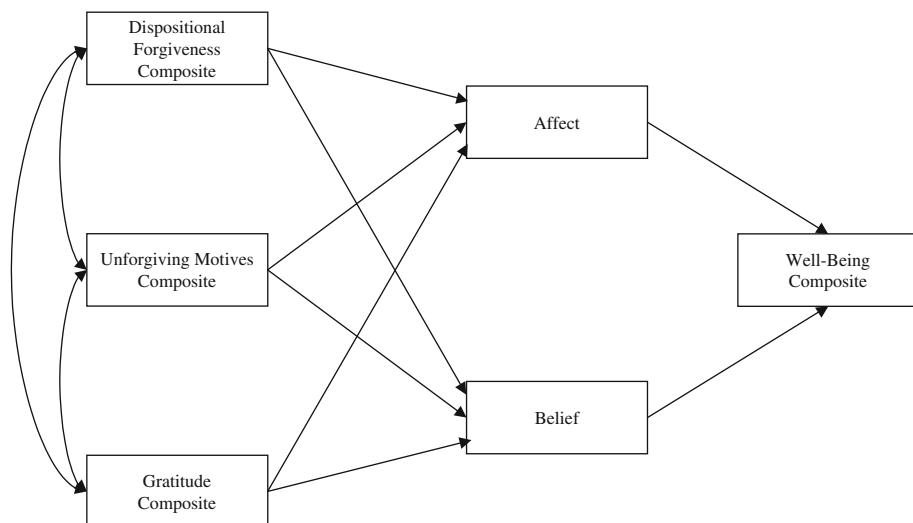
Fig. 1 Conceptual model of mediational associations between forgiveness, gratitude, affect, belief, and well-being

characteristics. First, their levels of well-being are overall much lower than general population samples, and hence, we are less likely to encounter ceiling effects which cause range restriction in the primary outcome variable and artificially attenuate the true relationships. Second, clinical outpatients often have issues regarding relationships that have helped or harmed them and they may have the most to gain through forgiveness and gratitude.

In general, our first aim is to assess key dimensions of forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being and examine the associations in a unique and, as of yet, understudied sample. Our second aim in this investigation is to examine potential mediators of the forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being association. Based on existing literature showing positive connections between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being we hypothesized that forgiveness and gratitude would be positively associated with all aspects of well-being. Also based on existing theoretical work we expected that these associations would be mediated by positive affect and belief states. Our expectations can be summarized in the general, conceptual model presented in Fig. 1.

2 Method

2.1 Participants and Procedures

Participants in this study were 72 psychotherapy outpatients from the suburban Philadelphia area. Most were seeking treatment for general distress and quality of life problems. The sample was almost equally split by gender (49% male) and age ranged from 20 to 58 years (*Md* = 37.5). Measures of forgiveness, affect, beliefs, and well-being were completed as part of a standard intake battery of assessments. All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the American Psychological Association.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Well-Being

Three assessments of well-being were utilized in this study, and as with all other measures, higher scores represent higher levels of well-being. The Bradburn Affect Balance Scale consists of 14 items. These items are responded to on yes-no, Likert-type, and ordinal scales. For example, respondents indicated (yes or no) if in the past few weeks they felt "on top of the world." They indicated, "how happy you are these days" on a Likert-type scale (0 = extremely unhappy to 7 = perfectly happy). They also responded to items such as, "Compared with your life today, how were things four or five years ago? Are things happier for you now, or were they happier then." This type of item was responded to on a 3-point scale (scored 1 = happier now, 0 = about the same, 0 = happier then). The total score was obtained by summing all item responses and multiplying by five, giving a range of 0–100. Reliability and validity of this scale have been shown to be acceptable in a variety of different samples (Bradburn 1969; Harding 1982; Van Schuur and Kruijbosch 1995).

The Fordyce Happiness Scale (Fordyce 1988) consists of one item responded to on a Likert-type scale and three items assessing the percentage of time a respondent feels happy, neutral, or unhappy. We utilized an adapted form of Fordyce's scale that included only the first item. This item asks respondents to indicate "how high or low is your level of well being?" on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (extremely low level of well-being; utterly depressed, completely down) to 100 (extremely high level of well-being; feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic) in 10 point intervals. Scores simply reflect the response made on the 0–100 scale. Reliability of this measure has been shown to be acceptable with test-retest correlation coefficients ranging from .59 to .85 over time intervals of 1.5–15 weeks. Convergent and discriminant validity has also been demonstrated using a variety of measures (e.g. personality, happiness, depression, etc.).

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) consists of five items. Each item is responded to on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include: "In most ways my life is close to my ideal," and "I am satisfied with life." Summing across all five items provides a total score for this scale. One of the most widely used measures of well-being, the satisfaction with life scale shows acceptable levels of reliability (αs = .79–.89; test-retest rs = .50–.84, for 2 week—4 year intervals). The satisfaction with life scale has also shown acceptable convergent and divergent validity with numerous other measures of well-being, mental health, personality, and distress (Pavot and Diener 1993).

2.2.2 Affect

The Friedman Affect Scale (Friedman 1998) is an adaptation of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-X (PANAS-X; Watson, D. and Clark, L. 2004, Unpublished manuscript) and was used to assess positive and negative emotional states. The scale contains 50 different words and phrases that describe different feelings and emotions and each is rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (very slightly or not at all) to 4 (extremely). Although the measure can be scored to yield ten different affect subscales (jovial, self-assurance, attentiveness, peace, love, hostility, guilt, sadness, fear, and fatigue) and two global positive and negative affect scales, the total score that consists of positive affect minus negative affect was of interest in this study. More positive scores (e.g., scores > 0) indicate a predominance of positive emotion, whereas more negative scores (e.g., scores

< 0) indicate a predominance of negative emotion. Reliability of this measure has been shown to be acceptable ($\alpha = .81$; test-retest $rs = .88, .72, .62$, and $.57$ for 1, 2, 3, and 4 week intervals, respectively). Of importance to note is that the Friedman Affect Scale also contains items referring to positive, love-based emotional states—an aspect of Friedman's adaptation of the PANAS-X that is critically important in examining connections between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being.

2.2.3 Belief

The Friedman Belief Scale (Friedman 1993) was used to assess positive and negative cognitions and thoughts. The scale contains 40 different self-evaluative statements (20 positive beliefs and 20 negative beliefs) each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Examples of negative items include: "I'm worthless," "I'm a failure," and "I'm inferior." Examples of positive items include: "I'm fine," "I'm important," and "I can cope." The measure can be scored to yield two global positive and negative belief scales. The total score that consists of positive beliefs minus negative beliefs was of interest in this study. Scores can range from 0 to 100. Higher scores indicate a predominance of positive self-evaluations, whereas lower scores indicate a predominance of negative self-evaluations. Reliability of the total score has been shown to be acceptable ($\alpha = .97$; test-retest r = $.92$ at 2 weeks, $.82$ at 4 weeks). Construct validity has been shown to be acceptable using a variety of relevant measures (personality, stress, relational).

2.2.4 Forgiveness

Two measures of forgiveness were used in this study. First, we used the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS; Thompson et al. 2005) to assess dispositional forgiveness. This was an 18-item scale that assesses dispositional forgiveness of oneself (6-items), others (6-items), and situations (6-items). Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1(almost always false of me) to 7 (almost always true of me). Scores were calculated by summing across appropriate items. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale has shown acceptable reliability ($\alpha s = .72-.87$) and convergent and discriminant validity with a number of relevant constructs (e.g., other measures of forgiveness, mental health, beliefs, etc.; Thompson et al. 2005). Second, we used the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough et al. 1998) to assess unforgiving motives. This was a 12-item scale that assessed revenge (5-items) and avoidance (7-items) motivations following a perceived interpersonal offense by a particular person. Responses are made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores are calculated by summing across appropriate items. The TRIM has shown acceptable internal consistency (revenge $\alpha = .90$; avoidance $\alpha s = .86-.94$) and test-retest reliability (revenge $rs = .53-.79$; avoidance $rs = .44-.86$ for 3–9 week intervals). The TRIM has also shown acceptable construct validity supported by confirmatory factor analysis and convergent and divergent correlations with other measures of forgiveness and related constructs (McCullough et al. 1998).

2.2.5 Gratitude

Two measures of gratitude were used in this study. First, we used the Gratitude Questionaire-6 (GQ-6; McCullough et al. 2002) that was developed based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. These analyses revealed a single dimension assessing

gratitude that was comprised of six out of an original thirty-nine items that express gratefulness, appreciation, and feelings about receiving from others. The six items are responded to on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert-scale. An example item is, "I have so much in life to be thankful for." Item responses are summed to obtain a scale score. Other correlational analyses provide evidence of internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) and construct validity (McCullough et al. 2002). Second, we used the Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test-Short Form (GRAT). This is an abbreviated version of the original Gratitude Resentment and Appreciation Test which contained 44 items assessing four domains of: (a) sense of abundance, (b) simple appreciation, (c) appreciation for others, and (d) importance of gratitude expression. The GRAT contains 16 items responded to on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree) Likert-scale. The total scale score is derived by summing across all items. Psychometric analyses provide evidence of good reliability ($\alpha = .92$) and construct validity with measures of affect, depression, and happiness. Further, the GRAT short-form correlates highly with the long form ($r = .95$).

2.3 Statistical Analysis

Analyses for this study proceeded in two phases. First, we examined Pearson correlations to determine if associations existed between forgiveness, affect, belief, and well-being. Second, we conducted a series of multiple regression analyses following the guidelines established by Baron and Kenny (1986) for evaluating mediation. These were a series of trivariate models designed to determine if the associations between each index of forgiveness and gratitude and each dimension of well-being were mediated by either affect or belief. When mediational analyses revealed that the mediating effects of affect or belief were partial and not full we used Amos 5 (Arbuckle 2003) to test the significance of the indirect effect using bootstrapped confidence intervals to determine if the reduction in the association between forgiveness or gratitude and well-being was statistically significant.

3 Results

3.1 Bivariate Associations

Table 1 contains the Pearson correlation matrix for all variables in this study. All correlations are statistically significant. Most of the correlations range between .40 and .80 with only a couple lower than .30. Three sets of correlations are of particular interest. First, it is noteworthy to point out that correlations between forgiveness and gratitude and the well-being outcomes range from .25 to .67 in absolute value (Mean $r = .43$). Second, correlations between forgiveness and gratitude and affect and belief mediators range from .33 to .68 in absolute value (Mean $r = .52$). Third, correlations between affect and belief mediators and well-being outcomes range from .60 to .87 (Mean $r = .73$). Also of interest is that correlations between all forgiveness and gratitude measures range from .34 to .78 in absolute value (Mean $r = .50$) and correlations between all well-being outcomes range from .59 to .83 (Mean $r = .69$).

3.2 Mediation Analyses

For mediation to be established, Baron and Kenny (1986) argue that four conditions must be met. First, forgiveness/gratitude must be correlated with well-being. Second,

Table 1 Pearson correlations among forgiveness, gratitude, affect, belief, and well-being

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. HFS-self											
2. HFS-others	.51***										
3. HFS-situation	.69***	.63***									
4. Avoidance	−.38***	−.53***	−.42***								
5. Revenge	−.34**	−.41***	−.51***	.64***							
6. Gratitude (GQ6)	.55***	.56***	.54***	−.42***	−.37**						
7. Gratitude (GRAT)	.40***	.49***	.49***	−.41***	−.43***	.78***					
8. Bradburn ABS	.43***	.28*	.41***	−.30**	−.42***	.52***	.52***				
9. Fordyce WB	.44***	.33**	.38***	−.25*	−.35**	.51***	.48***	.83***			
10. SWLS	.57***	.32**	.52***	−.31**	−.39***	.64***	.67***	.59***	.66***		
11. Friedman AS	.50***	.42***	.54***	−.43***	−.49***	.58***	.55***	.87***	.79***	.60***	
12. Friedman BS	.65***	.37***	.64***	−.33**	−.46***	.68***	.63***	.75***	.65***	.70***	.77***

Note: * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$; $N = 72$ for all correlations, except for correlations involving GQ6 or GRAT $N = 71$

forgiveness/gratitude must be correlated with affect/beliefs. Third, affect/beliefs must be correlated with well-being, controlling for forgiveness/gratitude. Fourth, the correlations between forgiveness/gratitude and well-being must be reduced to nonsignificance when affect/beliefs are controlled.

The first and second requirements for mediation are met by showing statistically significant bivariate correlations in Table 1. Forgiveness and gratitude are both correlated with well-being (condition one), and further, forgiveness and gratitude are both correlated with affect and beliefs (condition two). To meet conditions three and four requires multiple regression techniques. Tables 2–7 show hierarchical multiple regression analyses examining the mediational associations between forgiveness, gratitude, affect, belief, and well-being. Evidence of mediation is present when in "step 2" of these tables the forgiveness/gratitude coefficient drops to nonsignificance and the coefficient for affect/beliefs is statistically significant. Step 1 in these models is identical to a bivariate correlation between forgiveness/gratitude and well-being. These results are also present in Table 1 but are included in Tables 2–7 to allow for easy comparison in terms of the magnitude of the drop in the correlation between forgiveness/gratitude and well-being when controlling for affect/beliefs. This is also represented in the column labeled "%Med" which represents the percentage of the association between forgiveness/gratitude and well-being that is accounted for by affect/beliefs. A "full" designation indicates that affect/beliefs completely mediated the association, whereas a numeric value shows the percent of mediation (and statistical significance). The ΔR^2 column represents the percent of variance accounted for in well-being by forgiveness/gratitude (step 1) and affect/beliefs (step 2).

Table 2 shows the associations between forgiveness and well-being and the role of affect as a mediator. Looking at the step one coefficients shows that forgiveness is

Table 2 Associations between dispositional forgiveness and well-being: affect as the mediator

Criterion variables	Predictors	Step 1 r	Step 2 pr	ΔR^2	%Med.
Bradburn well being	HFS-self	.45***	−.03	.20	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.84***	.56	
Bradburn well being	HFS-others	.30**	−.19	.09	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.87***	.69	
Bradburn well being	HFS-circumstances	.43***	−.14	.18	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.85***	.59	
Fordyce well being	HFS-self	.47***	.10	.22	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.73***	.42	
Fordyce well being	HFS-others	.33**	−.03	.11	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.77***	.52	
Fordyce well being	HFS-circumstances	.39***	−.09	.16	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.77***	.48	
Satisfaction W/life	HFS-self	.57***	.38***	.32	.33**
	Friedman affect scale		.44***	.13	
Satisfaction W/life	HFS-others	.32**	.10	.11	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.54***	.26	
Satisfaction W/life	HFS-circumstances	.52***	.29**	.27	.44**
	Friedman affect scale		.44***	.14	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$; N = 72

Table 3 Associations between dispositional forgiveness and well-being: beliefs as the mediator

Criterion variables	Predictors	Step 1 r	Step 2 pr	ΔR^2	%Med.
Bradburn well being	HFS-self	.45***	−.11	.20	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.69***	.38	
Bradburn well being	HFS-others	.30**	.03	.09	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.73***	.49	
Bradburn well being	HFS-circumstances	.43***	−.12	.18	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.70***	.40	
Fordyce well being	HFS-self	.47***	.04	.22	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.54***	.23	
Fordyce well being	HFS-others	.33**	.12	.11	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.62***	.34	
Fordyce well being	HFS-circumstances	.39***	−.07	.16	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.59***	.29	
Satisfaction W/life	HFS-self	.57***	.21	.32	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.53***	.19	
Satisfaction W/life	HFS-others	.32**	.10	.11	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.66***	.39	
Satisfaction W/life	HFS-circumstances	.52***	.13	.27	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.56***	.23	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$; $N = 72$

Table 4 Associations between unforgiving motives and well-being: affect as the mediator

Criterion variables	Predictors	Step 1 r	Step 2 pr	ΔR^2	%Med.
Bradburn well being	Avoidance	−.31**	.16	.10	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.86***	.67	
Bradburn well being	Revenge	−.41***	.03	.17	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.85***	.60	
Fordyce well being	Avoidance	−.25*	.18	.06	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.79***	.58	
Fordyce well being	Revenge	−.34**	.10	.11	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.77***	.53	
Satisfaction W/life	Avoidance	−.31**	−.07	.09	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.54***	.27	
Satisfaction W/life	Revenge	−.39**	−.13	.15	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.51***	.22	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$; $N = 72$

moderately to strongly correlated with well-being in a positive direction. The step two partial coefficients show that when affect is considered in the equation, the association between forgiveness and well-being is dramatically reduced. In fact, the association between forgiveness and well-being is reduced to nonsignificance in all but two of the cases. Table 3 shows a set of similar associations between forgiveness and well-being, except that the mediator in question became belief instead of affect. Step one coefficients

Table 5 Associations between unforgiving motives and well-being: beliefs as the mediator

Criterion variables	Predictors	Step 1 r	Step 2 pr	ΔR²	%Med.
Bradburn well being	Avoidance	−.31**	−.10	.10	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.73***	.48	
Bradburn well being	Revenge	−.41***	−.13	.17	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.70***	.41	
Fordyce well being	Avoidance	−.25*	−.04	.06	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.64***	.38	
Fordyce well being	Revenge	−.34**	−.06	.11	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.62***	.34	
Satisfaction W/life	Avoidance	−.31**	−.11	.09	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.66***	.40	
Satisfaction W/life	Revenge	−.39**	−.10	.15	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.63***	.34	

* $p \le .05$; ** $p \le .01$; *** $p \le .001$; $N = 72$

Table 6 Associations between gratitude and well-Being: affect as the mediator

Criterion variables	Predictors	Step 1 r	Step 2 pr	ΔR²	%Med.
Bradburn well being	Gratitude (GQ6)	.56***	.06	.31	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.81***	.46	
Bradburn well being	Gratitude (GRAT)	.52***	.11	.28	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.82***	.48	
Fordyce Well Being	Gratitude (GQ6)	.56***	.15	.31	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.70***	.33	
Fordyce well being	Gratitude (GRAT)	.48***	.09	.23	Full
	Friedman affect scale		.72***	.39	
Satisfaction W/life	Gratitude (GQ6)	.65***	.46***	.43	.29**
	Friedman affect scale		.35**	.07	
Satisfaction W/life	Gratitude (GRAT)	.67***	.51***	.45	.24*
	Friedman affect scale		.36**	.07	

* $p \le .05$; ** $p \le .01$; *** $p \le .001$; $N = 71$

for this analysis are identical to those in Table 2, but step two coefficients show the mediational effects of belief on the association between forgiveness and well-being. Belief acts as a powerful mediator, in that, all of the associations between forgiveness and well-being are reduced to nonsignificance after accounting for beliefs.

Table 4 shows the associations between unforgiving motives and well-being and the role of affect as a mediator. Looking at the step one coefficients shows that unforgiving motives are moderately correlated with well-being in an inverse direction. The step two partial coefficients show that when affect is considered in the equation, the association between unforgiving motives and well-being is dramatically reduced. In fact, the association between unforgiving motives and well-being is reduced to nonsignificance in all of the cases. Table 5 shows a set of similar associations between unforgiving motives and well-being, except that the mediator in question becomes belief instead of affect. Step one

Table 7 Associations between gratitude and well-being: beliefs as the mediator

Criterion variables	Predictors	Step 1 r	Step 2 pr	ΔR^2	%Med.
Bradburn well being	Gratitude (GQ6)	.56***	.06	.31	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.62***	.27	
Bradburn well being	Gratitude (GRAT)	.52***	.11	.28	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.63***	.28	
Fordyce well being	Gratitude (GQ6)	.56***	.17	.31	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.47***	.15	
Fordyce well being	Gratitude (GRAT)	.48***	.13	.23	Full
	Friedman belief scale		.51***	.20	
Satisfaction W/life	Gratitude (GQ6)	.65***	.34**	.43	.48**
	Friedman belief scale		.45***	.12	
Satisfaction W/life	Gratitude(GRAT)	.67***	.42***	.45	.37**
	Friedman belief scale		.47***	.12	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$; $N = 71$

coefficients for this analysis are identical to those in Table 4, but step two coefficients show the mediational effects of belief on the association between unforgiving motives and well-being. Belief acts as a powerful mediator, in that, all associations between unforgiving motives and well-being are reduced to nonsignificance after accounting for belief.

Table 6 shows the associations between gratitude and well-being and the role of affect as a mediator. Looking at the step one coefficients shows that gratitude is moderately to strongly correlated with well-being in a positive direction. The step two partial coefficients show that when affect is considered in the equation, the association between gratitude and well-being is dramatically reduced. The association between gratitude and well-being is reduced to nonsignificance in all but two of the instances. Table 7 shows a set of similar associations between gratitude and well-being, except that the mediator in question becomes belief instead of affect. Step one coefficients for this analysis are identical to those in Table 6, but step two coefficients show the mediational effects of belief on the association between gratitude and well-being. Belief acts as a powerful mediator, in that, all but two of the associations between gratitude and well-being are reduced to nonsignificance after accounting for belief.

4 Discussion

4.1 Forgiveness, Gratitude, and Well-Being

The first aim in this study was to utilize key assessments of forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being and examine their associations in a sample of adult clinical outpatients. It was hypothesized that forgiveness and gratitude would be positively associated with all of the measures of well-being. Bivariate results show strong support for this hypothesis. Associations between forgiveness and well-being variables were moderate-to-strong in size and noticeably larger than those reported in previous studies (Sastre et al. 2003; Maltby et al. 2005). Associations between gratitude and well-being variables were strong and consistent with previous work in terms of magnitude (Emmons and McCullough 2003; McCullough et al. 2002).

The connection between gratitude and well-being is quite strong and robust across studies. In college student samples, patients with neuromuscular diseases, and in clinical psychotherapy outpatients, the positive associations between gratitude and well-being appear to persist in both direction and magnitude. The size of the associations is particularly impressive. The lowest correlation in the present study was .48 and the highest was .76. This speaks to a positive psychological characteristic that if fostered through psychotherapy interventions, could have a clinically significant impact on levels of well-being. In fact, evidence of this already exists. Emmons and McCullough (2003) have demonstrated the effectiveness of gratitude manipulations as have Friedman and Toussaint (2006a). In both cases, positive changes in gratitude are linked with positive changes in well-being. Recently, Seligman et al. (2005) have also demonstrated that gratitude effects may have lasting value for well-being that extends for one month. In sum, the consistency of the effects of gratitude suggest that this should be taken seriously by clinicians as a viable tool for enhancing well-being in clients in distress.

The associations between forgiveness and well-being appear less robust across studies. Studies reviewed above by Sastre et al. (2003) and Maltby et al. (2005) show conflicting pictures of the associations between forgiveness and well-being. McCullough et al. (2001) also documented the absence of a connection between forgiveness motives and satisfaction with life. However, the findings in the present study paint a dramatically different picture. All associations between forgiveness and well-being were statistically significant, most at the $p < .001$ level, and moderate-to-strong in magnitude. The divergence of our findings with those of previous studies could be due to at least two important factors. First, previous work has been conducted exclusively with college-student and general population samples. In contrast, our study utilized psychotherapy outpatients. Perhaps forgiveness has its most dramatic effects for those who are struggling with significant relationship issues. Second, previous work has not addressed the multidimensional nature of forgiveness. Previous work has focused exclusively on forgiveness of others, but the present study has examined forgiveness of others, as well as, forgiveness of oneself, circumstances, and unforgiving motives. This is an important issue because it appears that forgiveness of oneself has the strongest connection to well-being out of all five of the different types of forgiveness that were assessed. Perhaps as Enright and The Human Development Group (1996) have point out, self-forgiveness is more difficult than other types of forgiveness, because self-forgiveness involves aspects of self-compassion and -reconciliation, two processes that are difficult for most individuals to understand and engage in. Enright and The Human Development Group also suggest that most individuals are more critical of themselves than others. For these reasons, lack of self-forgiveness may have a dramatic downside for well-being, but for those who achieve it, the well-being payoffs are equally pronounced. Other researchers have also discussed the connection between lack of self-forgiveness and shame and guilt, two powerful negative emotions that are likely to detract from the experience of well-being (Hall and Fincham 2005; Tangney et al. 2005).

All told, it appears that there are positive associations between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being. Although the connections between gratitude and well-being appear to be of great magnitude and more consistency, the connections between forgiveness, at least in the present study, are sizable enough to warrant attention by clinicians. However, it may be that careful decisions will need to be made in determining which of these positive characteristics to attempt to foster in the psychotherapeutic setting and in what sequence. Friedman in his clinical work with distressed clients (Friedman and Toussaint 2006a), for example, focused first on forgiveness of self and others in the early psychotherapy sessions and then later on gratitude. Other clinicians might find that other sequences work for them.

On the other hand, it may be useful to use both forgiveness and gratitude interventions with some clients and with others it may be beneficial to emphasize gratitude first and then forgiveness. More clinical work and research is needed on these important topics.

4.2 Mediating Roles of Affect and Belief

Our second aim in this investigation was to examine potential mediators of the forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being association. Based mainly on existing theoretical work we expected that the associations between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being would be mediated by positive affect and belief states. Our mediational analyses, utilizing multiple regression techniques, generally showed strong support for this hypothesis. The initial associations between forgiveness and well-being and gratitude and well-being that appeared fairly large in magnitude were often fully reduced to nonsignificance. This pattern of findings held quite consistently across multiple measures of forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being. When partial mediation was present, associations between forgiveness and gratitude with well-being were reduced by a substantial (24–48%) and statistically significant margin. Instances of partial mediation were not common (only 6 out of 42 models) and all were linked to the satisfaction with life aspect of well-being. While forgiveness and gratitude were still strongly linked to this dimension of well-being, factors in addition to affect and beliefs appear to be important in mediating these associations. Perhaps more specific aspects of beliefs such as self worth are more important than general self-evaluative beliefs.

Our mediation analyses provide support for theories of forgiveness (Foundation for Inner Peace 1975; Friedman 1989; Jampolsky 1999; Worthington and Wade 1999; Worthington et al. 2001) and gratitude (Friedman 1989; McCullough et al. 2002) that purport that these positive psychological characteristics have their effects through the mechanisms of affect and belief. Although theory does discuss the importance of cognitive-belief variables to some extent, greater attention seems to be paid to affect in the extant theoretical and empirical literature. Importantly, in the present study it appears that cognitive beliefs are as important, if not more important, as compared to affect. To summarize, our multiple regression-based mediation analyses suggest that affect and belief are important mediators of the associations between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being.

4.3 Limitations and Future Directions

This study has at least three key limitations. First, it is cross-sectional in nature and contains all of the limits of studies employing this type of design. Hence, even though we have at times tended to discuss forgiveness and gratitude as causal factors in well-being, it is entirely plausible that individuals with higher levels of well-being may be more inclined to show forgiveness and/or gratitude to others. In this sense, forgiveness and gratitude might simply be pleasant by-products of well-being. We believe that this is not likely given initial experimental (Emmons and McCullough 2003; Seligman et al. 2005) and clinical work (Friedman and Toussaint 2006a). Continued clinical and experimental work should bear out the causal actions of forgiveness and gratitude in contributing to higher levels of well-being. Second, this study was limited by a relatively small sample size. As a result, the complexity of our statistical models had to be kept to a minimum, and important confounding variables (i.e., socio-demographics, personality) were not able to be included. Nevertheless, collecting data from 70 + clinical, psychotherapy clients in a private clinic is an arduous and time consuming task. Third, we have conceptualized well-being

according to the tripartite model of happiness. This conceptualization may not be the most accurate model of well-being that is associated with forgiveness and gratitude. Some religious and philosophical notions of forgiveness and gratitude suggest stronger ties to meaning and purpose in life, spirituality, self-development, and morality, than to more self-centered dimensions of well-being. It would be useful if future studies examined these constructs to determine if forgiveness and gratitude are correlated in similar fashion and if affect and beliefs act as mediating mechanisms.

To our knowledge, the present study is the first study of its kind to examine forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being in a unique sample of clinical, psychotherapy outpatients. Another unique aspect of this study is that we examined the mediating role of affect and belief in the associations between forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being. Generally speaking, we found that forgiveness and gratitude are associated with improved well-being and that these associations are largely, though not totally, accounted for by affect and beliefs. There is growing interest in positive psychological interventions for the enhancement of human well-being, and it appears that forgiveness and gratitude may have an important place in the positive psychologist's repertoire of well-being enhancing techniques and exercises that may also be very powerful interventions in psychotherapy.

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