

Does activating justice help or hurt in promoting forgiveness? ☆

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Abstract

Do justice values promote or obstruct forgiveness? This question has received virtually no empirical attention, even though past theorizing suggest two different answers. The literature on forgiveness suggests that justice constitutes a barrier to forgiveness, suggesting that the activation of justice values should decrease the probability of forgiveness. Conversely, the literature on justice and human values indicates that justice and forgiveness are positively associated, suggesting that the activation of justice should enhance the probability of forgiveness. Consistent with the latter line of reasoning, three studies, using complementary priming methods, provide converging evidence for the prediction that the activation of justice promotes (rather than obstructs) forgiveness. Implications for extant theory regarding forgiveness and justice are discussed.

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Introduction

Only until recently, social scientists have started to acknowledge the important role of forgiveness for understanding important life outcomes, such as relationship well-being, as well as psychological and physical well-being (e.g., Fincham, 2000; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwkerk, & Kluwer, 2003; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). Social psychologists have devoted extensive empirical attention to the precursors of forgiveness, thereby focusing on personality factors, relationship factors, and offence-specific factors that determine level of forgiveness (for an overview, see McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). However, an important issue that has received considerable theoretical attention in the for-

giveness literature, but has received only little empirical attention, is the relationship between people's justice values and forgiveness (e.g., Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003). Are people's justice values related to forgiveness? And if so, do people's justice values increase, or decrease level of forgiveness towards others?

It is surprising that these questions have not been addressed empirically, since several authors have argued that the relationship between justice and forgiveness seems pertinent to our understanding of when and why people forgive their offenders (e.g., Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Exline et al., 2003). Moreover, empirical research on the relationship between justice and forgiveness is especially important, since previous theory and research can support two opposing hypotheses, as we argue in this article. The central purpose of the present research is to examine whether the activation of justice exerts enhancing or detrimental effects on forgiveness. We now turn to discussing why activating justice may exert detrimental or enhancing effects on forgiveness.

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Detrimental effects of justice

Why are people sometimes not able to forgive the offender, even in the face of offered apologies, strong commitment, and a generally forgiving personality? An important barrier to forgive others that has been proffered in the literature on forgiveness includes a person's justice values (e.g., Enright et al., 1992; Exline & Baumeister, 2000; McCullough, Sandage, & Worthington, 1997). That is, a person who forgives his or her offender may violate his or her own values of justice. The reasoning is that justice conceptions entail an eye-for-an-eye approach to the offender ("I will pay him back!"), whereas forgiveness involves the cancellation of a debt created by the offender's action ("Despite what he did, I forgive him." Hebl & Enright, 1993). According to this reasoning, forgiveness requires "the loosening of justice standards in order to permit mercy" (Exline & Baumeister, 2000, p. 147). It is, at least from this perspective, conceivable that people perceive, and hold, negative associations between justice and forgiveness. Hence, activating the concept of justice would plausibly lead to decreased levels of forgiveness. Indeed, the seemingly incompatibility of justice and forgiveness led Exline and Baumeister (2000) to propose that if justice concerns are very salient, a person would be less likely to forgive.

Hitherto, however, the forgiveness literature has implicitly focused on only one justice motive, namely *retributive* justice. Feelings of retributive justice entail the motivation to take actions in response to wrongdoing, and to sanction the offender for his or her actions (e.g., Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997). Indeed, if retribution would be the only conception of justice people have, justice salience would conceivably lead to decreased levels of forgiveness. However, forgiveness researchers have typically focused on retributive justice alone, thereby largely neglecting other important justice motives. Indeed, forgiveness researchers using the general term justice typically mean retributive justice (e.g., Exline et al., 2003).

Enhancing effects of justice

A completely different picture emerges if one considers the more general literature on social justice, and the literature on human values. Surprisingly, these two literatures have received only modest attention in the literature on forgiveness, despite the fact that, as noted, forgiveness researchers have often stressed the importance of studying justice values in order to broaden our understanding of when and why people forgive.

There is strong evidence from the general literature on justice that people's subjective conceptions of justice are much broader than retribution alone. First, research on procedural justice indicates that justice values not only involve punishment of the offender for his or her

actions (i.e., retribution), but according to a person's justice beliefs, the conflict should also be solved in a fair manner (e.g., Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1987). More generally, it has been widely shown that the fairness of procedures appears to be an important justice concern to people. In fact, this research shows that people are concerned not only with how fairly they are treated themselves, but people are also very much concerned with how others are being treated (LaTour, 1978; Van den Bos & Lind, 2001).

Second, research on distributive justice has demonstrated that people's conceptions of justice also entail a fair distribution of resources. For example, a person typically is more satisfied with equal rewards if he or she and another person have contributed equally to a task, than when he or she receives more rewards than the other (i.e., overpayment; Adams, 1965). Also, people seem to have a strong tendency to distribute resources equally among themselves and others (e.g., Deutsch, 1975; Van Lange, 1999). Thus, importantly, both lines of research on procedural and distributive justice suggest that justice conceptions for an important part include concern for the welfare of others (Tyler et al., 1997).

The idea that justice can be considered a prosocial belief (i.e., concern for the welfare of others) is further empirically supported by findings from the literature on human values. In their extensive work on the content and structure of human values, Schwartz and his colleagues (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, 1990) showed that human values can be categorized in different motivational types (for an overview see Schwartz, 1992). Importantly, in their research it is consistently found that justice and forgiveness are two values that are strongly correlated in terms of how much people endorse these two values. Their research demonstrates that justice and forgiveness are two values that can be arranged into the same domain of values serving the same motivational goal, namely promoting the welfare of others. Other values that can be categorized in this prosocial domain of values are for example helpfulness, loyalty, and honesty (Schwartz & Huisman, 1995). Thus, in line with the general literature on justice, the value literature empirically supports that justice is indeed strongly related to other values that pursue the welfare of others.

The present research

The preceding discussion suggests that justice is a much more *social* construct than forgiveness researchers often seem to assume. Based on findings from both the general justice literature and the literature on human values, it can be predicted that justice salience leads to increased levels of forgiveness (Hypothesis 1). However, we began this introduction with a brief overview of the relationship between justice and forgiveness as proposed in the literature on forgiveness. In this literature, it is of-

ten implied that justice salience may increase concerns for retribution. Hence, based on this reasoning, justice salience would lead to decreased levels of forgiveness (Hypothesis 1_{alt}).

We present three studies in which we explored the effect of justice salience on people's propensity to forgive others, using different priming methods to increase justice salience. After participants were primed with justice, in all three studies they completed a questionnaire that assessed a person's propensity to forgive others, that was recently developed and validated by Berry, Worthington, Parrot III, O'Connor, and Wade (2001). We examined whether participants who were primed with justice (compared to various control conditions) became more, or less, forgiving.

Study 1

To examine the effect of justice salience on the propensity to forgive, in Study 1 participants were simply asked to think of the concept of justice and write down the thoughts that came to mind when thinking about the concept of justice. After justice was made salient in this way, the propensity to forgive others was measured.

In addition, provided that justice and forgiveness can both be regarded as values that are located in the prosocial domain of human values, we predicted that the salience of any other prosocial value (i.e., other than justice) would yield similar effects on forgiveness (i.e., increased level of forgiveness). As briefly mentioned in the introduction, besides justice and forgiveness, another value that is located within the same motivational domain of prosocial values is helpfulness (Schwartz, 1992). Therefore, similar to the effect of justice salience, we predict that the propensity to forgive others increases if helpfulness is made salient. We compared the effects of justice and helpfulness with two control conditions, in which participants either received no prime, or in which participants were asked to think about the concepts of ambition, a value not located in the prosocial domain of human values (see Schwartz, 1992).

Method

Participants

Seventy-three participants (20 men, 52 women, 1 gender unknown, 20.4 years on average) participated in this experiment, and received 1 Euro for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions (justice prime, helpfulness prime, ambition prime, and no prime).

Procedure

Participants were told that they were going to participate in two unrelated studies, which they completed in in-

dividual cubicles. In the first part of the study, participants were either primed with justice, helpfulness, ambition, or received no prime. In the justice-prime condition, it was stated that the researchers were interested in people's thoughts of the concept of justice. Participants were asked to think about this concept, and then to write down what had come to mind while thinking about 'justice.' Below these instructions, there were seven lines where participants could write down their thoughts. In the helpfulness and ambition-prime conditions, the same instructions were given for the concepts of, respectively, helpfulness and ambition. In the no-prime condition, participant did not receive any of these instructions.

To control for possible mood effects of the primes, participants then responded how they felt at this moment with regard to 4 positive feelings (happy, cheerful, excited, and content), $\alpha = .90$, and 4 negative feelings (angry, sad, distressed, and upset), $\alpha = .83$ (on 7-point scales). In the no-prime condition, participants began the questionnaire with these items.

Finally, participants completed the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgiveness (TNTF; Berry et al., 2001). This scale originally consists of five brief scenarios, in which a person is hurt by someone. For the present research, we translated four of the five original scenario's into Dutch language.¹ Participants were asked to read the described situation and to imagine that this happened to themselves. After each of the four scenarios, participants indicated on a 7-point scale to which extent they would forgive the transgressor in the scenario (1 = *definitely not forgive*, 7 = *definitely forgive*). We averaged the scores of the four scenarios to obtain a measure of participants' propensity to forgive ($\alpha = .73$).

Results

Affect

We tested whether the different priming conditions caused an effect on participants' positive or negative affect. An analysis of variance revealed that the different primes did not significantly influence positive affect, $F(3, 52) = 0.57$, *ns*, or negative affect, $F(3, 52) = 0.12$, *ns*.

Propensity to forgive

An analysis of variance revealed that there was an effect of priming condition on the propensity to forgive, $F(3, 72) = 5.73$, $p < .001$. Tukey post-hoc tests (for means, see Table 1) revealed that participants who were primed with justice, were not significantly more forgiving than participants who were primed with help-

¹ Only four of the five scenarios were used because of time constraints. Also, from previous studies, we learnt that the fifth scenario of the original scale (see Berry et al., 2001) decreased the reliability of the translated scale. For consistency, the same four scenarios were used in Studies 2 and 3.

Table 1
The effects of the different primes on the propensity to forgive

Prime	Mean	SD	N
Justice	3.83 _a	1.19	19
Helpfulness	3.67 _a	1.19	18
Ambition	2.75 _b	0.72	18
No prime	2.78 _b *	1.12	18

Note. Means with no subscript in common differ significantly according to Tukey post hoc test.

* For the comparison between the helpfulness prime and the no prime conditions, $p = .054$.

fulness. Moreover, consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants in the justice-prime and helpfulness-prime conditions exhibited significantly higher levels of forgiveness than participants in both the ambition-prime and no-prime conditions (albeit marginal for the comparison between the helpfulness and no-prime condition, $p = .054$). Level of forgiveness in the ambition-prime condition did not significantly differ from the no-prime condition.²

Complementary analysis

We explored what thoughts participants brought to mind when thinking of the concept of justice. The thoughts that participants had written down were categorized into retributive or prosocial notions of justice by two independent judges (there were no disagreements; interrater reliability $r = 1$). Consistent with our reasoning, in that people's notions of justice are more prosocial than is implied in the forgiveness literature, it appeared that most participants (i.e., 18 out of 19) wrote down prosocial notions of justice (examples are "equal division," "everyone should be treated equally"). In contrast, only 4 out of 19 participants wrote down thoughts related to retribution (for example, "he that mischief hatches, mischief catches"), and of these 4 participants only one participant exclusively wrote down retributive justice thoughts.³

The results of Study 1 provide initial support for Hypothesis 1, in that justice salience leads to an increased, rather than a decreased, propensity to forgive others. Additionally, coding participant's self-conceived justice notions revealed that, indeed, people predominantly seem to have prosocial rather than retributive notions of justice. The idea that justice is a much more prosocial value than forgiveness researchers often assume, is fur-

ther supported by the finding that justice salience exerts an effect on forgiveness similar to the effect of helpfulness salience.

Study 2

In Study 2, we wanted to replicate the finding that justice salience increases the propensity to forgive, using a more subtle manipulation of justice salience. By using the explicit manipulation of justice in Study 1, one may argue that the results of Study 1 may have been vulnerable to demand characteristics.

Method

Participants

Thirty-nine undergraduates (10 men, 29 women, 20.2 years on average) participated in this research, in exchange for 1 Euro. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (justice prime, neutral prime).

Procedure

Participants completed the research materials in individual cubicles. It was told that the questionnaire consisted of several unrelated brief studies. The first part of the questionnaire served to prime participants with justice. It was stated that we were looking for a picture for a cover of a book that we were going to publish. Participants in the justice salience condition were shown the famous image of Justitia, the Roman goddess of justice (the lady with the blindfold and the scales in one hand). Participants were instructed to answer three questions with regard to this image. They indicated on 7-point scales whether they thought this image was beautiful, nice, and recognizable (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). We assumed that the image of Justitia is widely known as a symbol for justice, and that almost anyone would recognize the famous image of Justitia (indeed, 89.5% of the participants in the justice salient condition responded with a 6 or a 7 to the question how recognizable they thought the image of Justitia was). Thus, we reasoned that exposure to this picture would increase accessibility of the concept of justice. In the control condition, participants were shown an image of a trumpet, and answered to the same questions with regard to this image.

In the second part of the questionnaire, participants completed a word-completion task. This task served to check whether the image of Justitia indeed caused increased accessibility of the concept of justice, compared to the control condition. Participants were asked to complete 20 unfinished words. Of these 20 words, six words could be completed as a justice-related word (e.g., fair, unjust, equal [translated from Dutch], or as words that were not related to justice), the other 14 were filler words (see Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, & Wilke,

² When controlling for positive and negative affect, the effect of condition on forgiveness yielded almost identical results.

³ Although there was thus little variance in the content of the justice thoughts, we examined whether the propensity to forgive was related to whether or not participants had brought to mind retributive justice thoughts. Participants who had brought to mind retributive justice thoughts ($N = 4$: $M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.07$) tended to exhibit lower levels of forgiveness than participants who had not brought to mind retributive justice thoughts ($N = 15$: $M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.20$), although this effect did not reach level of significance, $F(1, 18) = 1.43$.

2002). Such word-completion tasks are commonly used to measure construct accessibility unobtrusively (e.g., Chen, Lee Chai, & Bargh, 2001). It was therefore expected that participants who first were asked to evaluate the image of Justitia would come up with more justice-related words than participants in the control condition, who had been asked to evaluate the image of a trumpet.

Finally, as in Study 1, participants completed the TNTF as an indicator of the propensity to forgive ($\alpha = .65$; although the α was lower than ideal, we judged it to be adequate). Given that the manipulation of justice salience caused no effects on mood in Study 1, in Studies 2 and 3 we did not include a mood measure.

Results

Manipulation check

First, we counted the number of justice-related words participants generated in the word completion task. To test whether the priming of Justitia indeed caused increased justice accessibility, we performed an analysis of variance with the number of justice-related words as dependent variable and condition (justice salient vs. control) as independent variable. As anticipated, participants in the justice salience condition completed more words as being justice related ($M = 1.32$, $SD = .94$) than did participants in the control condition ($M = 0.65$, $SD = .75$), $F(1, 38) = 5.99$, $p < .05$.

Propensity to forgive

We performed an analysis of variance to examine the effect of justice salience on the propensity to forgive, which revealed that participants in the justice salient condition exhibited a greater propensity to forgive ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.42$) than participants in the control condition ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.95$), $F(1, 38) = 4.63$, $p < .05$. Thus, in line with the results of Study 1, these results provide further support for the prediction that if justice salience increases, participants' propensity to forgive others increases.^{4,5}

⁴ Participants evaluated the image of Justitia as significantly more beautiful than the image of the trumpet, $M = 5.47$ vs. $M = 4.05$, $F(1, 39) = 7.33$. Participants' evaluations of niceness and recognizability did not significantly differ. Including these evaluations as covariates, with propensity to forgive as dependent variable and condition as independent variable, revealed that the effect of condition remained significant, $F(1, 34) = 4.32$, $p < .05$.

⁵ We also examined whether the number of justice related words in the word-fragment completion task mediated the effect of condition on level of forgiveness. Although there was a small but nonsignificant correlation between number of justice words and forgiveness, $r(37) = .10$, *ns*, the effect of condition on forgiveness remained significant when the number of justice words was included as a covariate in the analysis of variance. Thus, we found no evidence for mediation. We suggest that the possibility of mediation may still be explored in future research using a larger sample size.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 provided good support for Hypothesis 1: Participants who were primed with justice, exhibited higher levels of the propensity to forgive others. From the results of Study 2, although not very likely, we cannot be sure whether the justice prime (i.e., image of Justitia) caused an increased effect of the propensity to forgive, or whether the control prime caused a decrease in the propensity to forgive. To address this issue, besides a condition in which justice was again made salient by means of the image of Justitia, in Study 3 we included a condition in which participants received no prime. Additionally, in Study 3 we manipulated justice salience in an even more subtle manner than in Study 2, namely by means of a watermark that was printed on the page on which participants completed the TNTF.

Method

Participants

Thirty-seven students (18 women, 19 men, 19.6 years on average) of the Free University in Amsterdam participated and received 1 Euro in exchange for their participation. They were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (i.e., justice prime, neutral prime, and no prime).

Procedure

All participants received a questionnaire that consisted of three pages, and completed this questionnaire in individual cubicles. The first page was only a cover page. On the second page was the TNTF. As in Studies 1 and 2, after each of the four scenarios, participants indicated on a 7-point scale to the degree to which they would forgive the transgressor in the scenario ($\alpha = .65$). On the third page, participants indicated their gender and age, and were asked to indicate what they thought was the goal of the study.

Manipulation of justice salience

In Study 3, justice salience was manipulated by means of the background of the sheet of paper on which the forgiveness scale (i.e., the TNTF) was printed. That is, in the justice condition the text of the TNTF was printed on a page that already had a light gray image of Justitia on it (i.e., a so-called watermark). The image had the size of the complete length of the page, and was the same image as used in Study 2. Thus, while reading and completing the TNTF, participants continuously had the image of Justitia in view, although they were presumably not continuously aware of the watermark. We reasoned

that in this condition justice is salient while completing the TNTF.⁶

We used two control conditions in which justice was not made salient. In the neutral prime-condition, the text of the TNTF was printed against a background of the logo of the university.⁷ In the no prime-condition, the TNTF was printed on a blank page. After participants had completed the TNTF, they filled in their gender and age, and responded to an open question that asked whether the participant had any idea of the purpose of the study, and if so, what the purpose was. Importantly, in response to this question, none of the participants mentioned the relationship between justice and forgiveness. In fact, none of the participants mentioned the watermark, and a common answer was that the purpose of the study was “to examine the extent to which people forgive various offenses.”

Results

An analysis of variance with level of forgiveness as dependent variable and condition (justice prime, neutral prime, and no prime) as independent variable revealed an effect of condition, $F(2, 34) = 5.57, p < .01$. Planned comparisons revealed that there was a significant contrast between the justice prime condition ($M = 3.77, SD = 0.99$) versus the neutral prime and no prime conditions ($M = 2.61, SD = 0.67$ and $M = 2.98, SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 34) = 10.01, p < .01$. Level of forgiveness did not differ between the neutral prime and the no prime-condition, $F(1, 34) = 1.14, ns$. Thus, consistent with the results of Studies 1 and 2, justice salience appears to increase, rather than decrease, participants' propensity to forgive others.

General discussion

At least implicitly, theorizing on forgiveness assumes that justice is in a competitive relation with forgiveness, arguing that feelings of justice tend to undermine the propensity to forgive. The present research challenged this belief, providing support for the argument that, often, feelings of justice may also be positively associated with forgiveness. Rather than acting as a barrier to forgiveness, findings of three studies, in which various

primes of justice as well as other prosocial values were employed, enhanced the propensity to forgive.

The proposition, often made in the literature on forgiveness, that justice salience decreases level of forgiveness (e.g., Exline & Baumeister, 2000; McCullough et al., 1997) may be rooted in the implicit assumption that justice concerns primarily involve needs for retribution. Indeed, if justice concerns would only involve such needs for retribution, justice salience would presumably not lead to increased levels of forgiveness. However, the present findings suggest that a ‘neutral’ justice prime seems to activate more general prosocial conceptions of justice, as evidenced by the finding that participants became more forgiving (i.e., prosocial) after a justice prime. Interestingly, in Study 1, content analyses demonstrated that the vast majority of participants indeed brought to mind prosocial rather than retributive notions of justice, suggesting that self-conceived notions of justice are much more prosocial than is often assumed in the forgiveness literature.

The present findings also contribute to the more general issue of what determines level of forgiveness. In three studies it is demonstrated that the activation of justice increases level of forgiveness, and in Study 1 it was demonstrated that also the activation of helpfulness increases level of forgiveness. More generally speaking, these findings indicate that the activation of the prosocial domain of human values increases level of forgiveness. The subtle manipulations of justice salience and its effects on forgiveness suggest that level of forgiveness may sometimes be determined by implicit cues from the environment that trigger a prosocial state of mind. Indeed, level of forgiveness, even regarding a specific offense, may fluctuate over a period of time (cf. temporary forgiveness; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). However, the reasons for such fluctuations in level of forgiveness are not yet clear. The present findings suggest that such fluctuations may—at least in part—reflect changes in a person's prosocial state of mind (i.e., fluctuations in activation of the prosocial value domain). In future research, it is important to further examine the variables that cause temporary fluctuations in level of forgiveness, an issue that has received very little theoretical and empirical attention.

Moreover, the present research has important implications for the literature on human values. Our findings demonstrated that activating a specific value (i.e., helpfulness, justice) can exert an effect on value-congruent motivation and behavior of a related, but different value (i.e., forgiveness). These findings are congruent with recent findings by Bernard, Maio, and Olson (2003), who demonstrated that providing cognitive support for a specific value not only made this specific value more resistant to persuasion, but made also related values of the same motivational domain more resistant to persuasion. Along with these findings, the present work

⁶ Stimulus materials are available on request with the first author.

⁷ We wanted to ensure that it was not just the fact that the questionnaire contained a watermark that caused the effects. Although we are quite aware of possible priming effects of the logo of the university (e.g., ingroup salience), we reasoned that in this case the university-logo as a watermark would be a neutral prime. That is, it will make sense for participants if a questionnaire that is filled out at the university, also contains the watermark of the university. Any other watermark (e.g., a trumpet), would probably not make any sense, and might therefore be very distracting.

suggests that values that are categorized within a specific motivational domain are *not only* related with regard to how strongly people endorse these values (Schwartz, 1992), but the salience of one value can actually influence other values within the same motivational domain.

Strengths, limitations, and future research

To our knowledge, the present research is one of the first studies that explicitly examines the association between justice and forgiveness. The findings demonstrate that justice salience can positively influence level of forgiveness in very subtle ways. Given the subtle, covert approach for manipulating justice salience, it is remarkable that across three studies we found consistent evidence in support of Hypothesis 1. However, before closing, we should acknowledge some limitations of the present research.

A first limitation stems from sample and method that were used for the present research. The research is conducted in the Netherlands, and it may well be the case that justice conceptions may differ between societies, in that culture may influence the core meaning of the justice value (Lind & Earley, 1992). Also, there may be personality differences that influence conceptions of justice (e.g., authoritarianism; Feather, 1998). Hence, cultural and personality differences may moderate the effect of justice salience on the propensity to forgive. Also, it is important to consider which specific *circumstances* are more likely to invoke especially retributive justice notions, and which circumstances are more likely to invoke prosocial notions of justice. For instance, our forgiveness measure included situations in which participants were asked whether they would forgive an offender with whom they had a (more or less) close relationship (e.g., a friend, a family member). Other social contexts (e.g., personal or property damage by a careless driver), however, may actually invoke retributive justice concerns, possibly causing decreased levels of forgiveness.

Moreover, we reasoned that temporal fluctuations in the motivation to forgive, depending on our experimental manipulations, should be reflected in the TNTF, which is a measure of a person's propensity to forgive others. Based on the present findings, we cannot be sure whether the effects of justice salience on the propensity to forgive can for instance be generalized to forgiveness regarding specific offenses.

Finally, we examined the influence of very general primes of justice on forgiveness. Theoretically, as argued in the introduction, retributive justice primes may obstruct forgiveness, while prosocial justice primes (e.g., fairness, equality) may enhance forgiveness. Thus, to further understand the relationship between justice and forgiveness, in future research, it is important to examine the possible differential effects of explicit retributive

justice versus prosocial types of justice on forgiveness, rather than the effect of very general justice primes. However, since the relationship between justice and forgiveness has not been examined empirically before, the important finding of the present research is that, at least at the more general level, justice and forgiveness tend to go together in our minds: people primed with the general concept of justice tend to become more forgiving. Hence, for the time being, it is most parsimonious and accurate to follow a model that suggests that justice and forgiveness tend to be positively (rather than negatively) associated—they may be more often friends than enemies.

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