

Research on Religion/Spirituality and Forgiveness: A Meta-Analytic Review

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In the present article, we review the literature on religion/spirituality (R/S) and forgiveness using meta-analysis. R/S was positively related to trait forgivingness (i.e., across relationships and situations; $r = .29$), state forgiveness (i.e., of a specific offense; $r = .15$), and self-forgiveness ($r = .12$). Contextual measures of R/S more proximal to the forgiveness process were more strongly related to state forgiveness than were dispositional measures of R/S. Measures of one's relationship with the sacred were more strongly related to self-forgiveness than were dispositional R/S measures. We discuss implications for next steps in the study of R/S and forgiveness.

Keywords: forgiveness, spirituality, coping

Until the early 1990s, forgiveness had been studied primarily by philosophers and theologians, and thus forgiveness was primarily conceptualized as a philosophical or religious construct. Since that time, however, the psychological study of forgiveness has expanded rapidly (for a recent review, see Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). Forgiveness has been associated with a variety of benefits for physical health, mental health, and relationships (McCullough, Root, Tabak, & Witvliet, 2009), primarily through the reduction of stress (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Given the numerous personal and social benefits of forgiveness, psychologists have sought to understand factors that might promote or hinder forgiveness. One factor that has received considerable attention in the psychological literature on forgiveness is religion/spirituality (R/S).

In the present article, we provide an overview of trends in research on R/S and forgiveness. Recently, research has shifted toward more fluid and contextual accounts of how R/S influences forgiveness. We conducted a meta-analytic review to explore the relationship between R/S and forgiveness, and we examined R/S

measurement moderators based on these theoretical shifts in the field.

Definitions

Forgiveness refers to a prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor, and includes the reduction of negative (and in some cases the increase of positive) thoughts, emotions, and motivations toward the offender that might eventuate in changed behaviors (Fehr et al., 2010; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Forgiveness of others has been measured as both a trait and a state.

Trait forgivingness refers to the degree to which a person tends to forgive across time, situations, and relationships. This construct is often measured with face-valid items (e.g., "I am a forgiving person") or by having participants rate the degree to which they would forgive across several hypothetical scenarios. A third strategy to assess trait forgivingness, which has been used rarely (e.g., Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005), involves aggregating forgiveness ratings for several specific offenses.

State forgiveness refers to a person's degree of forgiveness of a specific offense. To study state forgiveness, researchers typically ask people to recall an offense. Participants briefly describe the offense qualitatively. Then they rate several measures regarding that offense, such as time since the offense, forgiveness, and empathy. They may also complete measures related to the context of the offense, including their perception of the offense (e.g., hurtfulness) and their relationship with the offender (e.g., commitment).

Self-forgiveness refers to one's degree of forgiveness of offenses that one has committed. For example, one may experience unforgiving emotions toward self (e.g., self-condemnation, guilt, shame) after perceiving that one has hurt another or violated one's own moral standards (Worthington, 2006). Self-forgiveness has generally been measured as a trait using face-valid items (e.g., Thomp-

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son et al., 2005). It has been difficult for researchers to distinguish prosocial self-forgiveness from pseudo self-forgiveness. For example, a psychopath might never experience shame or guilt for an offense, which is different from a prosocial course of self-forgiveness that involves appropriate levels of guilt and shame that subside after the offender apologizes or offers restitution (Hall & Fincham, 2005, 2008).

Spirituality is defined as a person's search for a sense of closeness or connection with the sacred (Davis, Hook, & Worthington, 2008; Hill et al., 2000). The sacred is whatever a person considers to be set apart from the ordinary and thus deserving of veneration, such as God, the divine, or ultimate reality (Hill & Pargament, 2003). Religiosity is related but distinct from spirituality, and is defined as one's search for the sacred within a tradition and community in which there is general agreement about what is believed and practiced (Hill et al., 2000). Most individuals in the United States experience the sacred as God or some divine being within the context of a religious tradition, and thus can be called a religious spirituality (Worthington & Aten, 2009; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). However, others might experience a sense of connection or closeness to nature, humanity, or the cosmos (called nature spirituality, humanistic spirituality, and transcendental spirituality, respectively; Worthington & Aten, 2009).

Since McCullough and Worthington's (1999) review of the literature on R/S and forgiveness, measures of R/S have proliferated (Hill & Edwards, in press). In particular, drawing on Pargament's (1997) stress-and-coping theory of religious coping, researchers have examined a variety of contextual R/S constructs that assess how people cope with stressors. Following suit, some forgiveness researchers have defined and developed measures for contextual R/S constructs such as how victims appraise the transgression context (e.g., viewing the offense as a desecration, feeling anger toward the sacred, or viewing the offender as spiritually similar) or try to cope with the offense (e.g., sanctifying forgiveness). Prior to these shifts, many R/S constructs were assessed as dispositions that tend to remain relatively stable over time (e.g., religious commitment, church attendance). In the following section, we briefly review these two eras of research on R/S and forgiveness.

R/S and Forgiveness

The Dispositional Era

The focus of research on R/S and forgiveness has shifted over the past decade. This first era of research on R/S and forgiveness primarily focused on dispositional R/S constructs. Namely, studies focused on whether certain kinds of people (i.e., with different levels of various R/S traits) were more forgiving than others. For example, are more religiously committed people more forgiving than less religiously committed people? Or are people from groups that highly value forgiveness more likely to forgive than people from groups that value it less? These studies explored potential differences in the forgivingness of R/S groups or broad characteristics, presumably because most religions (and spiritualities) value forgiveness (Rye et al., 2000), and people should be motivated to act consistently with their beliefs and values.

This body of work resulted in weak evidence for a main effect of R/S dispositional constructs on forgiveness. In their qualitative

review of R/S and forgiveness, McCullough and Worthington (1999) suggested that measurement of forgiveness as disposition or state may moderate the relationship, such that the relationship is stronger ($r = \sim .40$) for trait forgivingness than state forgiveness ($r = \sim .20$). Because measures of trait forgivingness use face-valid items or ask people how they would respond to hypothetical scenarios, they do not assess reactions to actual offenses; thus, the relationship between these measures of trait forgivingness and R/S may be inflated by socially desirable responding (for initial evidence, see Barnes & Brown, 2010). In contrast, state forgiveness is usually measured by having people think of actual offenses and rate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors regarding that offense. McCullough and Worthington (1999) reported that those studies employing a state forgiveness measure inconsistently found a weak correlation ($\sim .20$) between R/S and forgiveness. This rough estimate was confirmed ($r = .19$; $k = 28$) in a recent meta-analysis of various correlates of state forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010). However, this meta-analysis had several limitations that we will discuss in the next section regarding treatment of R/S measurement moderators. Taken together, this line of research suggests that R/S dispositions only weakly predict ($\sim 4\%$ of the variance) reported forgiveness of actual, "state-based" offenses. Of course, the differences in relationships when R/S is measured as a trait versus a state is not unique to the study of forgiveness. For example, the well-established positive relationship between religiousness and self-reported prosocial tendencies (which, like forgiveness, consists of a value that is religiously congruent) holds true when the measures are contextualized, but only with certain qualifications such as low-cost helping actions or whether the people being helped are personally known (Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren, & Dernelle, 2005).

Although Fehr et al. (2010) computed a relationship between R/S and state forgiveness in a meta-analysis using 28 effect sizes, except for that effort, the field has not been subjected to quantitative analysis. Thus, one aim of the current meta-analysis is to provide the first quantitative summary of the relationship between R/S and trait forgivingness. We also provide an update to the estimate of the relationship between R/S and state forgiveness provided by Fehr et al. (2010). Despite the high quality of the overall meta-analysis of forgiveness by Fehr et al., the current review located an additional 22 effect sizes, which has strong potential for affecting the conclusions drawn from the Fehr et al. analysis with only 28 effect sizes. Thus, in the present meta-analyses we examined the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: R/S will be positively and moderately correlated with trait forgivingness.

Hypothesis 2: R/S will be positively and weakly correlated with state forgiveness.

The Contextual Era

The psychology of religion has been substantially influenced by studies on the relationship between R/S and health, especially Pargament's (1997) stress-and-coping theory of religious coping. The broader field has become increasingly interested in not only dispositional R/S constructs but also R/S constructs that describe how people understand and cope with stressors from moment to moment. Accordingly, forgiveness researchers have begun to ex-

amine more fluid, contextual, and relational accounts of how R/S affects forgiveness. Rather than just focusing on R/S dispositional constructs, they have also defined and studied contextual R/S constructs that vary within R/S individuals over time.

Programmatic research on R/S and forgiveness (rather than studies that simply included R/S as a covariate) has increasingly focused on such contextual R/S constructs. We highlight a few key examples. First, Cohen, Malka, Rozin, and Cherfas (2006) examined differences in beliefs between Jews and Christians regarding whether one should forgive if the offender has not apologized or offered restitution. They found such beliefs moderated the link between religious commitment and forgiveness. Second, drawing on moral disengagement theory, Tsang et al. (2005) theorized that people might use R/S to morally justify their current motivations toward an offender. Thus, people who have higher degrees of unforgiveness should prefer justice rather than merciful (a) ideas of the sacred, and (b) scripture verses. They found initial correlational evidence in 38 undergraduates that was consistent with this theory. Third, drawing on stress-and-coping theories of forgiveness and R/S coping, Davis and colleagues have examined how victims' appraisals of the spiritual context surrounding a transgression influence forgiveness (e.g., Davis et al., 2008, 2009). For example, how victims view the quality and nature of their relationship with the sacred (e.g., closeness, trust, anger), the spiritual meaning of the offense (e.g., it hurt my relationship with God; it destroyed something sacred to me), and the quality and nature of the offender's relationship with God (e.g., viewing the offender as spiritual similar or as evil) were all significantly related to forgiveness, even after controlling for other known predictors of forgiveness, such as hurtfulness of the offense or other trait-like measures of R/S (e.g., Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, & Gartner, 2012).

A second aim of the current meta-analysis was to address this shift toward contextual R/S constructs. Namely, the meta-analysis by Fehr et al. (2010) found that, in general, situational constructs (e.g., state empathy, attribution of responsibility for the offense) accounted for more variance in forgiveness than did dispositional constructs (e.g., agreeableness, neuroticism). However, of the relatively small number of studies in their meta-analysis that included an R/S measure (28 of a total of 175 studies), R/S was always assumed to be a dispositional variable. Therefore, they did not examine R/S measurement moderators, such as whether R/S was assessed as a dispositional or contextual R/S construct. It does not make sense theoretically to group dispositional and contextual R/S constructs together. In addition, constructs tend to be more strongly related to the degree that they are causally proximal (as suggested by McCullough & Worthington, 1999). For example, Mahoney et al. (1999) have shown that R/S variables that are more proximal to one's marriage relationship (e.g., sanctification, or treatment marriage as sacred) are more strongly related to marital satisfaction than are R/S variables that are more distal to one's marriage relationship (e.g., individual religiousness). Similarly, contextual R/S constructs (e.g., viewing a transgression as a desecration) that are more proximal to the forgiveness process may be more strongly related to forgiveness than dispositional R/S constructs that are more distal to the forgiveness process. Thus, in the present meta-analysis, we tested the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between R/S and state forgiveness of others will be stronger when R/S is measured using contextual constructs (state measures of R/S) rather than dispositional constructs (e.g., religious commitment).

Forgiveness of Self

Another development that has occurred over the last decade is the emergence and acceleration of research on self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005). Thus, prior reviews have not addressed the relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness. Whereas almost all religions (and spiritualities) promote forgiveness of others as a virtue (Rye et al., 2000), prior theorizing has been relatively silent regarding how dispositional R/S constructs (e.g., religious commitment) might be related to forgiveness of self. Several studies have accumulated that theorized and explored a link between relational spirituality measures (Hill & Edwards, *in press*), which assess the quality and nature of one's relationship with the sacred, and one's tendency to extend forgiveness toward the self (e.g., Exline, Yali, & Lobel, 1999; Ingersoll-Dayton, Torges, & Krause, 2010). Namely, extending attachment theory or other relational theories (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2005), these authors have expected correspondence between individuals relationship with the sacred (e.g., viewing the sacred as merciful, kind, available, supportive) and their ability to treat the self compassionately and forgivingly.

Thus, the third aim of the current meta-analysis was to summarize research on R/S and self-forgiveness quantitatively. Given the lack of prior theory on the overall relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness, we did not have an a priori hypothesis about the direction or magnitude of the overall relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness, but we did expect R/S measurement to moderate this relationship. Thus, based on prior theory, we tested the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: The relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness will be stronger when R/S is assessed using an attachment-like measure than when R/S is assessed with a general measure of R/S (e.g., religious commitment).

Taken together, the purpose of the present study was to provide a review of the literature on R/S and forgiveness that addresses several limitations in prior reviews. First, we sought to provide (a) the first quantitative summary of the relationship between R/S and trait-forgiveness; (b) a more definitive estimate (using almost twice the sample size) of the relationship between R/S and state forgiveness, accounting for a key R/S measurement moderator that may have inflated the estimate by Fehr et al. (2010); and (c) the first quantitative summary of research on R/S and self-forgiveness, including examination of a theory-based R/S measurement moderator.

Meta-Analytic Review

To test the primary hypotheses, we conducted three separate meta-analyses: (a) R/S and trait forgiveness, (b) R/S and state forgiveness, and (c) R/S and self-forgiveness. Many of the studies in the present review included several measures of R/S and forgiveness. For each meta-analysis, we estimated an overall effect size and tested hypothesized moderators.

Method

Inclusion Criteria

Published and unpublished studies were included in the present review if they reported a sample size and the correlation between R/S and either trait forgivingness, state forgiveness, or self-forgiveness (these tables and references are available upon request from the first author). If a study did not report a correlation between R/S and forgiveness, it was included only if (a) the correlation could be obtained from the author, or (b) the correlation could be calculated from other reported information, such as *p* or *t* values in conjunction with *N*.

Measures of R/S

We grouped R/S measures into two categories. The first category assessed trait and trait-like constructs that tend to be fairly stable over time, such as religious commitment (Worthington et al., 2003), God image (e.g., Gorsuch, 1968), and attachment to God (Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002). The second category of R/S measures assessed contextual measures of R/S, such as a victim's appraisal that a transgression destroyed something sacred (Pargament, Magyar, Benore, & Mahoney, 2005).

Measures of Trait Forgivingness

Common measures of trait forgivingness include self-report instruments, such as the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS; Thompson et al., 2005), Trait Forgivingness Scale (TFS; Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005), or the Transgression Narrative Test of Forgivingness Scale (TNTF; Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001). For example, for the HFS and TFS, participants rate their degree of forgiveness using face-valid items (e.g., "I am a forgiving person"). For the TNTF, which was developed using item response theory, participants read five brief hypothetical transgressions and rate how likely they would be to forgive in each situation, which is of scaled and increasing difficulty to forgive. We did not include measures that collapse forgiveness of other and self. (e.g., the Brief Mental Measurement of Religion & Spirituality; Pargament, 1999).

Measures of State Forgiveness

Forgiveness of specific offenses has been studied primarily by having participants' recall an actual offense (e.g., "Think of a time when someone hurt you deeply") and then rate their degree of forgiveness of the offense using a self-report measure, such as the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations (TRIM; McCullough et al., 1998), the Rye Forgiveness Scale (RFS; Rye et al., 2001), or the Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI; Subkoviak, Enright, Wu, & Gassin, 1995). Such measures of state forgiveness have been widely used; they are supported by substantial psychometric evidence.

Measures of Self-Forgiveness

Studies on R/S and self-forgiveness have primarily been studied using trait measures. Both the Mauger Forgiveness Scale (MFS;

Mauger et al., 1992) and the HFS (Thompson et al., 2005) include a (trait) self-forgiveness subscale. Recently, measures of state self-forgiveness have also been developed (e.g., Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008).

Literature Search

To include a wide range of studies on R/S and forgiveness, we used three methods to locate studies for the current meta-analysis. First, we identified studies by conducting searches on ERIC, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, Medline, Social Work Abstracts, Business Complete, and Dissertation Abstracts International databases through January 5, 2011. We used the search terms [*forgiv**] and [*spirit* OR religio**]. Second, we examined the reference sections of articles uncovered by the search and published reviews (e.g., Fehr et al., 2010; McCullough & Worthington, 1999) to add other relevant studies. Third, we contacted the corresponding authors of studies on R/S and forgiveness, and we requested any unpublished manuscripts.

Effect size. The main effect size used in this study was the Pearson product-moment correlation (*r*).

Missing data. Some studies did not contain sufficient effect size data (e.g., reporting only regression coefficients and not correlations). For each study with insufficient effect size data, we requested missing data from the corresponding author. If the necessary data could not be obtained, we excluded the study (*N* = 6) from the analysis.

Outcome of search. Our search resulted in 1,406 abstracts. Articles that met inclusion criteria were retrieved and coded by the first author. Overall, we found 64 independent samples reporting an effect size of the relationship between R/S and trait forgivingness, 50 for R/S and state forgiveness, and 23 for R/S and self-forgiveness.

Coding. The coding of studies included sample size and effect size data. We also coded potential moderators including study design and measurement characteristics. Study design characteristics coded involved source of data (published or unpublished). An effect for source of data would suggest that publication bias could be present, which might limit the conclusions that could be drawn from the meta-analysis. Measurement characteristics included name of the R/S measure, which was later coded to examine R/S moderators (e.g., R/S contextual measures; relational measures).

In our primary analyses, for each sample, we only used one effect size (Quintana & Minami, 2006; Rosenthal, 1994) for each type of forgiveness (i.e., trait, state, self) for each individual sample. If more than one effect size was reported in a particular study, we used the following decision rules. First, we chose a contextual measure of R/S over a trait measure (given that fewer studies included contextual measures of spirituality, we wanted to use as many effect sizes as possible in order to examine this measurement moderator). Second, we chose measures with stronger psychometric properties (i.e., with higher Cronbach's alphas in the sample).

Data analysis. We used Comprehensive Meta-Analysis Version 2.2 (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2005) to conduct data analysis. Random effects models were used because the data were found to be affected by moderators (see *I*² values reported in Table 1). Consistent with random effects models,

Table 1

Summary of Meta-Analytic Review On R/S and Trait Forgivingness, State Forgiveness, and Self-Forgiveness

	<i>n</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI	<i>I</i> ²	<i>k</i> ⁺	<i>r</i> ^{adj}	95% CI
Overall R/S and trait forgivingness	99,177	64	.29	.26 to .32	81.16	0	.29	.26 to .32
Publication source								
Unpublished	89,793	20	.24	.19 to .30	78.41			
Published	9,384	44	.31	.27 to .36	79.36			
Overall R/S and state forgiveness	8,932	50	.15	.10 to .19	81.10	0	.15	.10 to .19
Publication source								
Published	6,690	33	.17	.11 to .22	79.45			
Unpublished	2,325	17	.10	.00 to .20	81.31			
R/S Measure								
Trait	7,411	41	.10	.05 to .15	77.26			
Contextual R/S measures	1,604	9	.31	.22 to .40	75.19			
Overall R/S and self-forgiveness	4,000	23	.12	.06 to .19	75.49	0	.12	.06 to .19
Publication source								
Published	2,542	12	.07	-.03 to .17	81.18			
Unpublished	1,458	11	.17	.08 to .26	66.12			
R/S Measure								
Relational	1,678	6	.21	.13 to .29	51.01			
Dispositional	23,222	17	.10	.01 to .17	73.787			

Note. CI = confidence interval; *K*⁺ = number of studies imputed using trim-and-fill; *r*^{adj} = estimate after imputing studies to adjust for publication bias; R/S = religion/spirituality.

studies were weighted by the sum of the inverse sampling variance plus tau-squared (Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2009). Tau-squared is the variance of the effect size parameters across the population of studies. Moderator analyses for categorical variables were conducted using mixed models. Namely, random effect models were used to estimate the effect size within subgroups, and fixed models were used to compare the effect sizes between subgroups (Borenstein et al., 2009). Power analysis revealed that the three meta-analyses each had power of .99 (Borenstein et al., 2009).

Results

The descriptive information and meta-analytic results for the overall effect sizes between R/S and forgiveness are summarized in Table 1. For the relationship between R/S and trait forgivingness, the total number of participants from the 64 samples was 99,177. For the relationship between R/S and state forgiveness, the total number of participants from the 50 samples was 8,932. For the relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness, the total number of participants from the 23 samples was 4,000.

The effect size for R/S and trait forgivingness was .29 (95% CI [.26, .32]; *I*² = 81.16; Hypothesis 1). The effect size between R/S and state forgiveness was .15 (95% CI [.10, .19]; *I*² = 81.10; Hypothesis 2). The effect size between R/S and self-forgiveness was .12 (95% CI [.06, .19]; *I*² = 75.49).

Publication Bias

We conducted a series of analyses to determine whether our results were affected by publication bias. Publication bias refers to the tendency for studies available to the reviewer to be systematically different from studies that were unavailable such that conclusions may be biased. First, we examined the differences in effect sizes between published and unpublished studies. For R/S and trait forgivingness, effect size was marginally higher for

published studies (*r* = .31) than for unpublished studies (*r* = .24, *Q*[1] = 3.80, *p* = .051). Publication status did not affect the relationship between R/S and state forgiveness (*Q*[1] = 1.13, *p* = .287). For R/S and self-forgiveness, there was a trend for the effect size to be higher for unpublished studies (*r* = .17) than for published studies (*r* = .10; *Q*[1] = 3.50, *p* = .061). Second, we used the trim-and-fill procedure (Duval & Tweedie, 2000) to estimate the effects of publication bias. The trim-and-fill procedure estimates the number of missing studies due to publication bias and statistically imputes these studies, recalculating the overall effect size. There was no evidence of publication bias using this method (see Table 1). The reader should remain aware that there are currently no well-accepted methods of determining the extent of publication bias; however, the results of these analyses did not indicate that publication bias is a substantial threat to the major conclusions of this meta-analysis.

Moderators

We tested two moderators of interest. First, we hypothesized (Hypothesis 3) that the relationship between R/S and state forgiveness would be stronger when R/S was measured as a contextual rather than dispositional construct (e.g., R/S appraisal rather than religious commitment). This hypothesis was supported. The effect size was higher (*Q*[1] = 14.95, *p* < .001) when R/S was measured as a contextual (*r* = .31, *p* < .001) than a dispositional construct (*r* = .10, *p* < .001).

Second, we hypothesized that the relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness (Hypothesis 4) would be stronger when R/S was measured as a relational rather than dispositional construct. This hypothesis was partially supported. The effect size was marginally higher (*Q*[1] = 3.73, *p* = .054) when R/S was measured as attachment or relationship with the sacred (*r* = .21, *p* < .001) than when R/S was measured as general R/S (*r* = .10, *p* = .024).

Ancillary Analyses

In order to provide greater confidence in the estimates from moderator analyses (and to provide greater information to the reader), we also conducted a supplementary set of analyses. Namely, we conducted separate meta-analyses of the relationship between R/S and forgiveness for categories of R/S measures with at least three effect sizes, using a shifting unit of analysis (see Table 2). There were nine categories of R/S measures that had at least three samples: religiosity, spirituality, intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, religious well-being, existential well-being, spiritual searching or doubting, R/S context, and R/S relationship (see Table 3). Because we used more than one R/S measure per sample in many cases, it is not appropriate to compare these estimates with moderator analyses. Rather, they are treated as separate meta-analyses, maximizing the number of effect sizes (i.e., k) per estimate. The main purpose of this analysis was to provide greater confidence in estimates from moderator analyses (which did not include as many studies), as well as to provide greater information to the reader. There were not any notable discrepancies in effect size estimates.

Discussion

The current meta-analytic review makes several important contributions to the study of R/S and forgiveness. Regarding the overall magnitude of the relationship between R/S and forgiveness, the average correlation between R/S and trait forgiveness was .29, whereas the average correlation between R/S and state forgiveness was .15. These findings are consistent with prior reviews that have suggested a moderate relationship between R/S and trait forgiveness and a smaller (perhaps inconsistent) relationship between R/S and state forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010; McCullough & Worthington, 1999).

Importantly, we considered an important shift in the way researchers have approached the study of R/S and state forgiveness. Namely, we compared studies that used a dispositional measure of R/S to studies that used a contextual R/S measure. Contextual R/S measures were moderately ($r = .31$) related to state forgiveness, whereas dispositional R/S measures were weakly related to state forgiveness ($r = .10$). This supports the idea that contextual R/S constructs that are more proximal to the forgiveness process are more strongly related to state forgiveness than are more distal

aspects of R/S. Furthermore, this finding confirms and sheds additional light on the discrepancy between R/S and state forgiveness noted by McCullough and Worthington (1999). The relationship between dispositional R/S and state forgiveness appears even weaker than observed in prior reviews. Therefore, distinguishing between R/S measures was important and requires careful attention in future research.

Another key contribution of the present review is that it provides the first aggregation of research on R/S and self-forgiveness. Although we did find a positive relationship between R/S and self-forgiveness, this relationship was modest. There was also a trend toward a stronger relationship when the measure of R/S was focused on the nature and quality of one's relationship with the sacred (e.g., attachment to the sacred; God image) than general R/S measures, providing support for theorizing regarding a link between one's relationship with the sacred and one's tendency to forgive the self. Relationships characterized by a more positive views of the sacred (e.g., accepting, compassionate) were associated with greater tendency to forgive the self.

Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations of the studies examined in this meta-analysis. First, more diverse samples are needed. The studies in the present review were mostly convenience samples (i.e., predominately Christian and White). Thus, not much is known about the contextual issues that may influence the forgiveness of an R/S community. For example, Nir (2009) studied forgiveness among Israelis, Palestinian Muslims, and Palestinian Jews. They found that religiosity was negatively related to forgiveness of someone from a spiritual outgroup. To that end, we encourage researchers to sample R/S samples strategically. Researchers might study "hot conflict" within R/S communities over time, such as a congregation split or approaching a vote on a controversial issue within a denomination (e.g., ordination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender leaders). They also might study intergroup conflicts fueled by religious ideology, or examine offenses by religious leaders (e.g., Roman Catholic leadership cover-ups of sexual abuse by priests; extravagant spending by public religious figures; sexual infidelity).

Second, more sophisticated research designs are needed. One drawback to examining contextual R/S constructs is that, because they can change over time, it makes it difficult to interpret the

Table 2
Summary of Meta-Analytic Review of R/S and Forgiveness by R/S Measure

	Trait forgivingness				State forgiveness				Self-forgiveness			
	<i>n</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI	<i>n</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI	<i>n</i>	<i>k</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI
Religiosity	93255	39	.35	.35 to .36	6383	35	.14	.09 to .18	9	1210	.04	-.06 to .14
Spirituality	1444	9	.23	.15 to .30	871	5	.12	.00 to .22	6	853	.05	-.02 to .12
Intrinsic	2159	8	.24	.20 to .28	1633	8	.12	.00 to .24	—	—	—	—
Extrinsic	—	—	—	—	859	4	.06	-.01 to .13	—	—	—	—
Quest/doubting	1362	3	.38	.29 to .39	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Religious well-being	1560	7	.28	.17 to .38	806	5	.17	.07 to .28	—	—	—	—
Existential well-being	1560	7	.29	.14 to .43	806	5	.23	.17 to .30	—	—	—	—
R/S context	1331	5	.27	.18 to .35	1918	10	.23	.15 to .30	—	—	—	—
R/S relationship	939	7	.28	.18 to .37	851	6	.22	.13 to .31	5	1570	.25	.08 to .40

Note. CI = confidence interval; R/S = religion/spirituality.

Table 3
Description of R/S Measures

R/S measures	Description	Example item
Religiosity	Measures of general religiosity or religious commitment, such as the Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington et al., 2003)	Religious beliefs influence all my dealings in life.
Spirituality	Measures of spiritual experience, such as the Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont, 1999)	I often feel that I am a part of the spiritual force one which all life depends.
Intrinsic religiosity	Measures of one's religious motivations that are based on internalized values (i.e., religion for its own sake; e.g., Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989)	It is important for me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and meditation.
Extrinsic religiosity	Measures of one's degree of religious motivations related to external benefits of religion such as status or reputation (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989)	It doesn't matter so much what I believe so long as I lead a moral life.
Quest/spiritual doubting	Measures that indicate the victim is struggling or doubting his or her relationship with God (e.g., Batson & Schoenrade, 1991)	As I grow and change, I expect my religion also to grow and change.
Religious well-being	Measures of one's sense of well-being related to being involved in an organized religion (Ellison & Smith, 1991)	I believe that God loves me and cares about me.
Existential well-being	One's sense of well-being related to existential realities such as fear of death, isolation, or sense of meaninglessness (Ellison & Smith, 1991)	I believe there is some real purpose for my life.
R/S context	Measures of the victim's spiritual appraisals when dealing with a transgression, such as viewing a transgression as a desecration or viewing the offender as spiritually similar (e.g., Pargament et al., 2005)	This event was both an offense against me and against God.
R/S relationship	Measures of the victim's attachment to God or image of God (e.g., angry or loving; e.g., Rowatt & Kirkpatrick, 2002)	God knows when I need support.

Note. R/S = religion/spirituality.

meaning of cross-sectional relationships. For example, such studies may simply capitalize on the sensitivity of spiritual coping measures to the current stressfulness of a transgression. Longitudinal designs are needed to examine whether contextual R/S constructs are related to longitudinal trends in forgiveness (Davis, Hook, Van Tongeren, & Worthington, 2012). Researchers should also employ experimental methods to manipulate contextual R/S constructs.

We propose that researchers continue to focus on contextual R/S variables that will help understand why R/S is related to higher levels of forgiveness. Among R/S variables with significant proximal potential include one's view of hurt or ridicule as having R/S meaning (Hale-Smith, Park, & Edmondson, 2012), R/S or theological differences that create interpersonal strain (Exline, Yali, & Sanderson, 2000), and ingroup loyalty/outgroup derogation as a function either of R/S group identity (Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010) or moral intuitions (Graham & Haidt, 2010).

Conclusions

We believe that this review highlights an important shift that has occurred in the study of R/S and forgiveness of actual offenses. More recent research appears to be focused on contextual R/S factors, which are currently not well understood. The focus on dispositional R/S variables and the fruitfulness of more correlational, cross-sectional studies comparing religious and nonreligious individuals may have mostly run its course. Accordingly, the field is working to theoretically elaborate and empirically explore how various contextual R/S constructs may moderate or mediate the relationship between R/S dispositions and forgiveness. This shift requires sophisticated research designs, including strategic sampling, longitudinal designs, or experimental methods. Furthermore, research on R/S and self-forgiveness is in its infancy. The dispositional era yield few implications for practitioners on how to

help R/S individuals forgive, but as research accumulates, and we learn more about when and how forgiveness (including self-forgiveness) occurs within R/S over time, this knowledge has the potential to advance our knowledge of how to promote forgiveness in R/S individuals.

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