

An Examination of Forgiveness and Revenge in Victims of Crime.

Courtney Timothy Field, B.A. (Hons).

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

School of Law,
Murdoch University.
Western Australia.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

Courtney Timothy Field

ABSTRACT

This body of work examines the concepts of forgiveness and revenge in victims of crime. Victims are historically under-researched and in particular there is a need for further examination of the psychological impact of victimisation. Twelve victims participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews concerning their understanding of forgiveness and revenge. Transcripts of these interviews were subsequently analysed using a rigorous Grounded Theory approach.

This thesis presents the argument that forgiveness is contextually bound; its exact nature being determined by the circumstances and consequences of a particular transgression. The research emphasises the intrapersonal nature of forgiveness, revealing a model that is considerably different from those that have been proposed by other researchers. In particular, the broad assumption that forgiveness is a 'prosocial' construct that involves the development of positive affect for a transgressor is not supported. Forgiveness is understood as a 'gift to the self' stemming from the development of deeper self-awareness concerning the impact of the offence on victims. With deeper self-awareness, victims are able to let go of the negative feelings, thoughts and behaviours which have resulted from the offence. Instead of developing benevolent feelings towards the offender, victims engage in perspective-taking which fosters attributions for an external locus-of-control for the offender's behaviour. The major result of forgiveness is a sense of moving on from the offence which can be understood as the lessening of a cognitive orientation to the past.

Revenge has received very little attention from researchers to date. Where it has been examined previously, it has been assumed to be a unidimensional construct. By posing a rich and intricate model, this thesis provides the most detailed understanding of revenge currently available. Revenge is a distinct form of aggression stemming from substantial negative affect towards the offender and entrenched feelings of powerlessness that result from the offence. These feelings of powerlessness result in a strong motivational drive to restore the balance between the victim and the offender. While generally an affective construct, victims tended to compulsively plan and fantasise about how they would exact revenge.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION i

ABSTRACT ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xi

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1

 1.1 Victims of Crime 4

 1.1.1 *Intangible costs of crime* 4

 1.1.2 *Crime as a Traumatic Event* 6

 1.1.3 *Causes and Symptoms of PTSD* 6

 1.1.4 *Evidence of PTSD in Victims of Crime* 8

 1.1.4.1 *Homicide* 8

 1.1.4.2 *Childhood Sexual Abuse* 9

 1.1.4.3 *Sexual Assault* 11

 1.1.4.4 *Assault* 12

 1.1.4.5 *Burglary* 14

 1.1.5 *Crime Victims and the Risk of PTSD* 15

 1.1.5.1 *The Effect of Sex* 15

 1.1.5.2 *Revictimisation* 17

 1.1.5.3 *Identification as a victim* 18

 1.1.7 *Summary* 20

 1.2 Forgiveness 20

 1.2.1 *Relevant Perspectives in Forgiveness Research* 22

 1.2.1.1 *The Morality of Forgiveness* 22

1.2.1.1.1	<i>Victims of crime and the morality of forgiveness.....</i>	25
1.2.1.2	<i>Attributional Pathways for Forgiveness</i>	27
1.2.1.3	<i>Forgiveness and mental health</i>	30
1.2.2	<i>Current Issues in Forgiveness Research</i>	31
1.2.2.1	<i>The Question of Definition</i>	31
1.2.2.2	<i>Is Forgiveness a Trait or a State?</i>	34
1.2.2.3	<i>Situating Forgiveness as an Interpersonal or Intrapersonal Process</i>	37
1.2.3	<i>Major Models of Forgiveness</i>	38
1.2.3.1	<i>Motivational model</i>	39
1.2.3.2	<i>The REACH model</i>	45
1.2.3.3	<i>Process model</i>	49
1.2.4	<i>Summary</i>	53
1.3	<i>Revenge</i>	55
1.3.1	<i>Revenge and its Relationship to Anger and Aggression</i>	56
1.3.1.1	<i>Revenge and the Hydraulic Model</i>	57
1.3.1.2	<i>Revenge and the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis</i>	57
1.3.1.3	<i>Is Revenge Hostile or Instrumental Aggression?</i>	59
1.3.2	<i>Unidimensionality</i>	59
1.3.3	<i>Goals of Revenge</i>	61
1.3.3.1	<i>Equity</i>	61
1.3.3.2	<i>Deterrence</i>	62
1.3.3.3	<i>Ego-defence</i>	64
1.3.4	<i>Revenge and Power</i>	67
1.3.5	<i>Consequences of Revenge</i>	68

1.3.6 Summary	70
1.4 Research Aims.....	71
1.5 Conclusion.....	72
CHAPTER II: METHOD AND AN OVERVIEW OF THE GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH.	74
2.1 Interview Development	75
2.1.1 Interviewing Technique.....	75
2.1.2 Item Development	76
2.2 Participant Recruitment.....	77
2.3 Participant Characteristics	80
2.3.1 Descriptive Statistics	80
2.3.2 Identifying Distress in Participants	81
2.3.3 The Effects of Research Participation on Traumatized Individuals	84
2.4 Procedure.....	86
2.5 Grounded Theory	88
2.5.1 Development and Divergence of Grounded Theory	89
2.5.2 Analysis of Data.....	91
2.5.3 Adequate Sample Size and Saturation in Grounded Theory	92
CHAPTER III: ANALYSIS OF FORGIVENESS DATA	94
3.1 Unforgiveness.....	94
3.1.1 Defining Unforgiveness	95
3.1.2 Components of Unforgiveness	96
3.1.2.1 The Role of Traumatic Stress in Unforgiveness.....	97
3.1.3 Data Analysis.....	98
3.1.3.1 Feeling Overwhelmed	98

3.1.3.2 <i>Self-blame</i>	100
3.1.3.3 <i>Negative Affect Towards Offender</i>	101
3.1.3.4 <i>Feeling stuck</i>	102
3.1.4.5 <i>Injustice and Indignation</i>	102
3.2 Components of Forgiveness	103
3.2.1 <i>Self-Awareness</i>	103
3.2.2 <i>Letting Go of Negative Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours</i>	107
3.2.3 <i>Perspective-Taking of the Offender</i>	113
3.2.4 <i>Moving on From the Offence</i>	119
3.3 An Overview of the Forgiveness Model	121
3.4 Secondary Factors Associated with Forgiveness	124
3.4.1 <i>Forgiveness as a Gift to Self</i>	124
3.4.2 <i>Caution in Approaching Forgiveness</i>	126
3.4.3 <i>Contact between Victim and Offender</i>	129
3.4.4 <i>Additional Outcomes of Forgiveness</i>	130
3.5 Conclusion.....	133
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF REVENGE DATA.....	134
4.1 Powerlessness	134
4.1.1 <i>Powerlessness and Trauma</i>	136
4.1.2 <i>The Relationship between Powerlessness and Revenge</i>	138
4.2 Redressing the Balance	139
4.2.1 <i>The Question of Proportionality</i>	140
4.2.1.1 <i>Subjective and Objective Assessments of Proportionality</i>	141
4.2.2 <i>The Role of Exaggeration</i>	142

4.3 Feelings towards the Offender	145
4.3.1 <i>Feelings of Anger</i>	145
4.3.2 <i>Feelings of Hatred</i>	147
4.3.3 <i>Wanting Harm to Befall the Offender</i>	150
4.4 Compulsive Planning.....	154
4.5 Defining Revenge.....	156
4.6 Consequences of Revenge.....	158
4.7 Factors Effecting Revenge	159
4.8 Conclusion.....	161
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	163
5.1 Victims of Crime	163
5.1.1 <i>The Sex of Participants</i>	165
5.2 Forgiveness Findings.....	167
5.2.1 <i>A Model of Forgiveness in Victims of Crime</i>	168
5.2.1.1 <i>Unforgiveness</i>	168
5.2.1.1.1 Being overwhelmed.....	169
5.2.1.1.2 Self-blame.	170
5.2.1.1.3. Negative affect for the offender	171
5.2.1.1.4 Feeling stuck.....	171
5.2.1.1.5 Evidence of PTSD.	171
5.2.1.1.6 Utility of unforgiveness.	172
5.2.1.2 <i>Self-awareness</i>	173
5.2.1.3 <i>Letting go of Negative Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours</i>	175
5.2.1.4 <i>Perspective-Taking of the Offender</i>	177

5.2.1.5 <i>Moving on From the Offence</i>	179
5.2.1.6 <i>Secondary Factors Effecting Forgiveness</i>	181
5.2.2 <i>The Role of Reconciliation</i>	182
5.2.3 <i>Contact Between Victims and Offenders and its Implications</i>	182
5.2.3.4 <i>Restorative Justice</i>	183
5.2.4 <i>Relationship and Relevance of Perspectives</i>	185
5.2.4.1 <i>The Role of Morality</i>	185
5.2.4.2 <i>The Relationship between Forgiveness and Mental Health</i>	188
5.2.4.3 <i>Evidence of Attributional Pathways</i>	189
5.2.5 <i>Contribution of the Model to Current Issues in Forgiveness Research</i>	190
5.2.5.1 <i>Contribution to the Definition Question</i>	190
5.2.5.2 <i>Forgiveness as a State or a Trait</i>	193
5.2.5.3 <i>The Intrapersonal Nature of Forgiveness</i>	193
5.2.6 <i>Major Models of Forgiveness</i>	194
5.2.7 <i>Summary</i>	196
5.3 <i>Revenge Findings</i>	197
5.3.1 <i>A Model of Revenge for Victims of Crime</i>	198
5.3.1.1 <i>Powerlessness</i>	198
5.3.1.2 <i>Redressing the Balance</i>	199
5.3.1.2.1 <i>Subjectivity and Proportionality</i>	200
5.3.1.3 <i>Feelings towards the Offender</i>	201
5.3.1.3.1 <i>Feelings of Anger</i>	201
5.3.1.3.2 <i>Feelings of Hatred</i>	202
5.3.1.3.3 <i>Wanting harm to Befall the Offender</i>	203

5.3.1.4 <i>Compulsive Planning</i>	204
5.3.2 <i>Factors Influencing Revenge</i>	205
5.3.3 <i>Multi-dimensionality and the Measurement of Revenge</i>	206
5.3.4 <i>Summary</i>	207
5.4 The Relationship between Forgiveness and Revenge	207
5.5 Utility of the Models	209
5.6 Limitations and Future Directions.....	212
5.7 Conclusion.....	216
APPENDIX 1.....	219
APPENDIX 2.....	222
REFERENCE.....	223

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the people who have assisted me over the course of this degree:

To my supervisors, Associate Professor Guy Hall and Dr. Jaimie Zander who have consistently offered support, encouragement and friendship in addition to their excellent feedback on my work.

To my 'study-buddy' Sofia whose friendship kept the feelings of isolation at bay. I promise I'll tidy my desk now, Sof.

To my parents, Peter and Ann Field for thirty-one years of love and support; for putting up with having a 'perpetual student' in the family; and for always encouraging me, even when I would have preferred you didn't.

To Dean. For pretty much everything, really.

To all my wonderful friends, in particular Gabby, Jessie, Meredith, Catherine, Nathan and Jane for their endless support, alcoholic and otherwise. I could not hope to call finer people my family.

To Annette and the Dzogchen Community in Perth for their friendship, support and sharing.

To Norma Foley who proof read this thesis prior to its submission and provided valuable feedback.

Finally, and most importantly, to the twelve brave people who participated in the interviews from which this thesis has sprung. You have each touched and inspired me more deeply than I can say.