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The Effect of Past Experiences on Forgiveness Intentions in Romantic Relationships

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THE EFFECT OF PAST EXPERIENCES ON FORGIVENESS INTENTIONS IN ROMANTIC
RELATIONSHIPS

By

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Department of Psychology

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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In

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CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

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The Effect of Past Experiences on Forgiveness Intentions in Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

This purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of incident recall (hurtful, kind) on forgiveness decisions in romantic relationships. Participants ($N=73$) were undergraduate students in a current relationship of at least one month in length, recruited through a mass email. In an online survey, participants were asked to think of a time within the past month that their partner was either kind or hurtful towards them. Next, they imagined twelve hypothetical transgressions committed by their partner.. For each transgression, participants indicated the extent to which they would engage in exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect responses. Results showed that in both incident recall conditions, participants reported significantly greater voice than exit responses. In the kind condition, participants reported significantly more loyalty than neglect responses. However, this effect was not observed in the hurt condition. Therefore, when people recall a kind event, they tend to respond with both active and passive constructive responses to a hypothetical transgression. Implications and future directions for research are discussed.

Keywords: forgiveness, romantic relationships, transgression, kind, hurtful

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Table of Contents

	Page
CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Method.....	9
Participants.....	9
Materials and Procedure.....	10
Results.....	13
Preliminary analyses.....	13
Main analysis.....	14
Figure 1a.....	16
Figure 1b.....	17
Discussion.....	18
References.....	24
Curriculum Vitae.....	27

Introduction

Even in the best romantic relationships, transgressions are likely to occur between partners. The victim's response to the transgressor may be influenced by a number of factors, such as the transgressor's past behaviour. Although these transgressions can be painful and difficult to endure, individuals are still motivated to maintain these relationships by forgiving. However, forgiveness decisions are unlikely to be made without considering some of the transgressor's past behaviour. The purpose of the present study was to examine whether thinking about a past experience with a romantic partner will influence forgiveness intentions.

Transgressions and Forgiveness

In a romantic relationship, a couple may engage in transgressions or betrayals against one another, despite efforts to maintain a positive relationship. Transgressions occur in moments that are driven by emotions within one's relationship and often involve interpersonal reactions between the individuals involved (Worthington & Wade, 1999). As such, one may consider their partner committing a transgression if the partner violates the expectations of a romantic relationship by being emotionally distant, saying hurtful things, lying, or engaging in relational infidelity.

In an effort to maintain a relationship after a transgression, the victim may choose to forgive their partner. Forgiveness behaviour is defined as a reflection of positive responses towards the relationship, while not engaging in responses that may be destructive for the relationship (Worthington & Wade, 1999; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). Forgiveness can occur on the victim's behalf with or without an apology from the transgressor. It is both an internal and external process which resolves negative emotions towards the transgressor. The choice to forgive, however, may differ depending on the type of transgression

that is experienced. For example, one may choose to forgive their partner if they forget their birthday, but not forgive their partner for being unfaithful. Forgiveness is intended to maintain rather than dissolve the relationship. This effort is a reflection of the values within the relationship, relating to the costs and benefits of that relationship, and the reasons one might have for maintaining it. As such, interdependence within a relationship and other factors are important to understand when interpreting how and why one forgives.

Interdependence Theory and Forgiveness

Interdependence theory describes relationships in terms of rewards and costs (Kelley & Thibault, 1978). McCullough et al. (1998) suggested that interdependence theory is important to forgiveness in romantic relationships as it explains the importance of quality and commitment to forgiveness decisions. The theory posits that for a couple to be interdependent, both individuals in the dyad must have reasons about the other partner that motivate them to remain in the relationship and rely on each other (Kelley & Thibault, 1978). This suggests that each partner holds influence over the other as partners feel the need to change their own behaviours to match those of their partner.

In addition to considering costs and rewards when deciding on how to behave in a relationship, being able to predict a partner's behaviour in future situations and express reasoning for one's own behaviour is important to an interdependent dyad. When demonstrating one's value of the relationship, partners will engage in behaviours that demonstrate commitment towards their partner (Kelley & Thibault, 1978). Finkel et al. (2002) relate interdependence theory to forgiveness by framing a betrayal as a difference in preferences among the partners. Specifically, they highlight that the *transformation of motivation* is important to forgiveness in that the motivation behind one's behaviour shifts from self-presentation to the importance of

relationship preservation. This suggests that one's relationship is of greater importance in such circumstances and therefore, may facilitate greater forgiveness tendencies. In response to a partner forgetting dinner plans, one may shift their intended response from yelling at her partner for forgetting the plans to making the effort to reschedule the plans. This change may explain one's tendency to forgive a partner following a transgression and is likely facilitated by the commitment one has to the relationship (Finkel et al., 2002).

Measuring Forgiveness in the Romantic Relationship Context

Due to the growing interest of forgiveness in social psychological research, many measures have been developed to assess forgiveness tendencies in the context of different social situations. It is important that such measures do not only capture forgiveness tendencies, but also the types of reactions and behaviours that accompany the response to a transgression. One measure of forgiveness, the transgression-related interpersonal motivations (TRIM) inventory was developed to measure different motivations that individuals can have towards the perpetrator after a transgression has occurred (McCullough et al. (1998). These motivations provide insight into whether victims' responses are intended to hurt or maintain their relationship with the transgressor. The inventory incorporates three types of motivations: *avoidance*, which is described as removing oneself, psychologically or physically, from contact with the transgressor in an effort to relieve hurt feelings; *revenge* which is having the intent to harm the transgressor back in some form; and *benevolence*, a response which indicates kindness and accommodation towards the partner for their transgression (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). Low ratings of *avoidance* and *revenge* motivations, which may or may not be accompanied with higher ratings of *benevolence*, indicate forgiveness tendency (McCullough, Root, and Cohen, 2006).

Rusbult (1993) suggests similar types of responses to transgressions, described as being destructive towards one's relationship. Additionally, there are passive and active ways to respond to transgressions, as well as responses that are constructive and destructive for the relationship (Rusbult, 1993). As such, the study posited that there are two dimensions of responses, active/passive and constructive/destructive, creating four possible response tendencies. These four response tendencies include: exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (EVLN). *Exit* is defined as a response involving active destruction in regards to the relationship—that is, individuals are intentionally responding in a way that is harmful to the relationship (Rusbult, 1993). For instance, breaking up with a partner or seeking vengeance following a transgression are two examples of the exit strategy. Another destructive response is *neglect*, which is passive rather than active. Examples of a neglect response include ignoring a partner or being silently angry about the transgression. There are two constructive strategies which are said to be beneficial to the relationship. *Voice* is categorized as an active constructive method in that the victim reacts by attempting to improve the relationship (Rusbult, 1993), and likely results in forgiveness of the transgressor (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Calmly talking to one's partner about the transgression is an active response which often facilitates improvement within the relationship in order for a couple to move past the conflict. Finally, *loyalty* is the passive constructive strategy of the EVLN which generally involves the forgiving partner excusing the transgressing partner for their behaviours and not addressing the problem. The loyalty response allows for the partner experiencing the transgression to wait for the problem to resolve itself, or rather ignore the actions and reaffirm one's belief that their partner's behaviour was unintentional. The four possible responses of the EVLN not only provide options for a way an individual may react, but it also includes important underlying traits that can be attributed to the relationship. Specifically,

the constructive responses are likely to preserve one's relationship as a result of forgiveness. As such, individuals with more constructive and less destructive tendencies tend to be more forgiving.

Relationship Factors Affecting Forgiveness

Preservation of the relationship is an important motivation found in relationships of high commitment, as suggested by Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibault, 1978). Previous research has explored how commitment towards a relationship and the quality of the relationship are related to the partner's forgiveness tendencies after a transgression. For example, in a study by McCullough et al. (1998) relationship satisfaction and commitment were found to be positively correlated with the transgression-related interpersonal motivations (TRIM) inventory of forgiveness tendency. Commitment and higher relationship satisfaction has been found to cause individuals to be more constructive (i.e., loyalty and voice) in their responses to transgressions (Finkel et al., 2002). Conversely, those who reported lower commitment and lower satisfaction were more likely to use destructive responses to relational transgressions (i.e., neglect and exit). The general exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect (EVLN) measures were used to understand the likelihood for one to respond in a particular way to a past transgression in their relationship (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). Partners who report higher ratings of commitment for their relationship also report a lower likelihood of responding negatively towards a partner after a transgression, as well as are more likely to underestimate the severity of their partner's transgression (Menzies-Toman & Lydon, 2005).

Rusbult et al. (1986) examined the EVLN as predicted by aspects of a relationship, such as satisfaction. They found that relationship satisfaction was positively correlated with voice responses to a previous transgression, while being negatively correlated with exit and neglect

responses; with no significant relationship with loyalty responses. Additionally, the study asked participants to assess how their response to the transgression had affected the relationship. Participants reported that negative consequences were associated with the destructive measures, while positive outcomes were associated with constructive measures. This assessment implies that destructive responses to transgressions results in outcomes which tend to be unfavourable to the maintenance of the relationship whereas the constructive responses yielded positive outcomes.

Finkel et al. (2002) examined betrayal in dating relationships and assessed exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect responses while manipulating commitment towards the relationship. The commitment level was manipulated by having participants answer questions that required them to think of their partner (high commitment) or to think about themselves independently (low commitment). For each of the twelve transgressions, participants were asked to rate how likely they would be to respond using exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect. The findings revealed that higher commitment caused less likelihood to respond destructively, but did not affect the constructive responses. However, they found main effects of constructiveness as well as activeness. In particular, constructive responses averaged higher than destructive responses and passive responses averaged higher than active. Voice responses were found to be the highest response tendency overall, with changes in destructive responses between high and low commitment conditions.

In addition to commitment, other aspects of one's relationship may have an effect on forgiveness tendencies, such as the attributions used to explain transgressions and the emotions that one experiences from them. In a study by Fincham, Paleari, and Regalia (2002), married couples were asked to answer a questionnaire on relationship quality and then to imagine their

spouse behaving negatively in four different scenarios. After each scenario, participants answered questions regarding the causal and relational attributions, negative and positive emotions, and forgiveness as measured by the agreement with four item responses for the transgression they recalled. Causal attributions, relational attributions, and emotional empathy were positively correlated with forgiveness, with negative reactions being negatively correlated. The attributions and emotional empathy were found to be more proximal in the determination of forgiveness tendencies, with marital quality having a mediating effect. That is, marital quality often facilitated the type of attributions and the types of emotional responses to the transgression. Higher marriage quality resulted in higher ratings of experienced empathetic emotions (i.e. soft-hearted) if the transgression occurred in the present, with lower ratings for the negative reactions. More causal attributions for the situation and lower responsibility for the transgressor were also reported when marriage quality was high. Forgiveness was thus reported as being more likely when these attributions and emotions were reported to be higher.

Partner Perceptions and Forgiveness

Past research has found a relationship between thinking about partners and general attributions for partner transgressions (Menzies-Toman & Lydon, 2005; Linardatos & Lydon, 2010). Participants in a study by Lindardatos and Lydon (2010) were asked to mentally visualize their romantic partner and then respond to six hypothetical transgressions with their level of agreement to each attributional statement. The statements were written to convey reasoning to why their partner would behave as described in the transgression. They found that thinking of one's partner facilitated more positive attributions than those who were in the control visualization. Similarly, Menzies-Toman and Lydon (2005) investigated benign appraisals and the effects on responses to transgressions. Benign appraisals resulted in victims being more

accepting of their partners after a transgression by responding in a constructive manner. Such behaviour reflects Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibault, 1978) in that people are more willing to accommodate partners in a way that will preserve their relationship, rather than jeopardize it. The results of these studies suggest that thinking of a partner can influence intended forgiveness behaviour. However, this research does not directly assess whether the valence of participants' thoughts about their partner affect intended behaviours.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present study is to extend previous research and examine whether positive or negative thoughts about a partner can affect behavioural intentions, such as decisions to forgive. In an effort to expand on previous findings by Linardatos and Lydon (2011), the present study focuses on past experiences within the relationship that may affect responses to hypothetical transgressions. To test this research question, participants in romantic relationships of at least one month recalled a recent past positive (when their partner was kind to them) or negative interaction (when their partner hurt them) with their partner.

To assess forgiveness intentions, participants were asked to indicate how they would respond to a number of hypothetical scenarios. The type of incident participants recalled was intended to affect how they respond to the hypothetical transgressions. Specifically, the recall of past kindness should elicit positive thoughts and feelings about their partner, whereas the recall of a past harm should elicit negative thoughts and feelings.

Previous research suggests that less destructive responses (more neglect than exit) are reported when people are reminded of their commitment and dependence with their romantic partner compared to their independence from their partner. However, constructive responses (loyalty and voice) show no significant difference (Finkel et al., 2002). As such, it was predicted

that when recalling a kind incident, participants will report more passive (neglect) than active (exit) destructive responses. Conversely, more active (exit) than passive (neglect) destructive responses were expected when a hurtful incident was recalled. Differences for constructive responses were not expected between conditions, but active (voice) responses were expected to be higher than passive (loyalty) overall.

Methods

Participants

A mass email requesting participation in a study about conflicts in romantic relationships was sent to 1215 undergraduate students attending Huron University College, a liberal arts affiliate college of Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. The email requested that individuals currently be in a romantic relationship of at least 1 month to participate.

Eighty-two participants completed the survey, however nine were excluded from the study because they did not meet the requirements. Of the nine participants, two indicated that they would be recalling a past relationship, one was not currently in a relationship, four did not provide descriptions of the incident, one indicated that their partner had not been hurtful towards them at any given time, and one did not report when the incident occurred. The final sample consisted of 73 participants (24 males, 48 females, 1 did not identify with either gender), ranging in age from 18 to 49 years ($M = 21.04$, $SD = 4.22$). Participants reported their relationships lasting between 1 month and 9 years, 2 months ($M = 23.70$ months, $SD = 23.48$). Of the relationship status options on the survey, one participant described his relationship as dating casually, 15 reported that they were dating regularly, 50 reported their relationship as dating steadily, six reported themselves as being engaged or married, and one reported other with a description that they are living with their partner. As well, for relationship exclusivity, 70

participants reported that neither them nor their partner date others, two participants reported they date others, and one reported that both they and their partner date other people. Through random assignment in Qualtrics, 35 participants were assigned to the kind incident recall and 38 participants were assigned to the hurtful incident recall condition.

Materials and Procedure

Through the email mass mailer, participants were given a link which directed them to the survey on Qualtrics, an online survey platform. A consent form was provided digitally which indicated that by selecting the participation option, individuals agreed to participate in the study. Instructions on the next screen prompted participants to complete the survey in the absence of their partner and additional distractors, asking them to confirm that they were free of distractions before continuing.

Next, participants were asked if they were currently in a relationship as well as to enter their partner's initials. This was to ensure that they would be thinking about their partner throughout the study. Participants answered questions specific to the nature of their relationship such as how long they have been in the relationship, the status of the relationship (dating, married etc.), and the exclusivity of the relationship (whether either partner is seeing other people or not). Participants also answered a shortened version of the Perceived Relationships Quality Components (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000) at the end of this section as a measure of overall relationship quality. The PRQC is a validated measure of relationship quality which the authors posit include the six aspects that comprise overall relationship quality: satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love (e.g., How passionate is your relationship?). The long version of the PRQC includes three questions for each component. However, Fletcher et al. (2000) determined that six items, one from each component, showed

good internal reliability for both long-term relationships and newly formed relationships ($\alpha = .88$; $\alpha = .85$, respectively), allowing for a shortened version of the PRQC to be used to measure global perceived relationship quality. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert for each question from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) and scores were averaged across all ratings to give an overall relationship quality rating. In the present study, the shortened PRQC was found to have good internal reliability ($\alpha = .85$).

In the following section, participants were asked to describe an event in which their partner was hurtful or kind towards them within the last month. Participants were asked to provide details of the event in a descriptive text box and when the event occurred within the past month (*this week, last week, 2 weeks ago, 3 weeks ago, 4 weeks ago, more than 4 weeks*). This was to check if participants were thinking about relevant incidents to the condition in which they were assigned. In addition to the incident description, participants were asked to indicate how they felt after the event on a 7-point scale ($-3 = \textit{very negative}$, $+3 = \textit{very positive}$) as well as to describe how the incident made them feel in another open ended question. Participants also answered how the incident impacted their relationship using a 7-point scale ($-3 = \textit{very detrimental}$, $+3 = \textit{very beneficial}$) and wrote an open ended response. These questions were to ensure that participants were thinking about the correct type of incident (manipulation check), that their feelings corresponded to the condition, as well as to have them focused on the feelings from that particular incident for the next section.

After the recall, participants were asked to imagine their partner committing twelve hypothetical transgressions, to which they were to imagine responding in four ways. For example, one of the transgressions given was “You find out that your partner kissed someone else at a party.” The responses for this example would be exit (“I would yell at my partner about

how horrible he/she has behaved”), voice (“I would tell my partner I’m glad things didn’t go further than ‘just kissing’”), loyalty (“I would understand that things got out of hand, and that my partner behaved in a very unusual manner on that occasion”), and neglect (“I would feel irritated at my partner for a while”). For each of the responses, participants were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would respond that way on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *not very likely*, 4 = *somewhat likely*, 7= *extremely likely*). The EVLN likelihood ratings were averaged across all twelve questions in order to provide a composite measure for each of the four response types. The EVLN measures in the present study were found to have acceptable internal reliability for measures of exit ($\alpha = .76$), voice ($\alpha = .81$), loyalty ($\alpha = .73$), and neglect ($\alpha = .72$). These findings closely resemble the reliability analysis by Finkel et al. (2002) who found alphas of .78, .84, .79, and .72 for each of the EVLN responses, respectively.

Upon completion of this section, participants were asked if they had any comments about the survey, in order to ensure that participants did not suspect the manipulations used in the study. The participants were given the option to enter in to a draw for a chance to win one of five date prizes which included a dinner and a movie for themselves and their partner at a restaurant and movie theatre at Western University. If the participant selected “no” they were brought to the end of that survey. If the participant selected “yes”, they were directed to a separate Qualtrics survey in order to keep their email information separate from their data. The final screen of both surveys contained the debriefing form for participants to read through. Overall, the survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Incident descriptions. Participants' responses to the open ended questions were reviewed to ensure that participants followed the instructions they were given and thought of incidents that pertained to their assigned condition (i.e., participants in the kind recall condition are reporting kind incidents). It was found that most participants responded with descriptions of the incident that were relevant to the condition which they were in (i.e. hurtful and that participants reported their partners initiating the hurtful or kind behaviours rather than themselves. Participants in the kind condition recalled moments in which their partner did something for them or showed affection, such as surprising one with a spontaneous date or taking care of them in a time of need. For the hurtful condition, many described arguments over various aspects of the relationship, such as forgetting a plan or disagreement over how dinner should be made. Additionally, some participants described underlying reasons for why their partner behaved in a certain manner, especially for the hurtful condition.

Manipulation checks. An independent samples t-test was used to test the difference between conditions of how the incident affected the relationship. Those in the kind condition reported the incident as being more beneficial ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.16$) towards the relationship than those in the hurt condition ($M = -.21$, $SD = 1.45$), $t(71) = 6.894$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.64$. Participants also indicated more positive feelings after the incident occurred for the kind condition ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .44$) compared to the hurtful condition ($M = -1.71$, $SD = .93$), $t(72) = 26.498$, $p < .001$, $d = 6.21$.

Time of recalled incidents. A significant difference was found among the time of occurrence of the recalled incidents, $t(71) = 2.437, p = .017, d = .57$. Kind incidents were reported as occurring more recently ($M = 1.46, SD = 1.24$) than hurtful incidents ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.66$). Because of this, time of incident was included as a covariate in the main analysis.

Relationship demographics. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine any differences between recall conditions for the length of the relationship. There was no significant difference between the length of the relationships reported for the hurt condition ($M = 27.58, SD = 23.32$) and the kind condition ($M = 19.49, SD = 23.26$), $t(71) = 1.483, p = .142, d = .35$.

Ratings of relationship quality as measured by the shortened version of the PRQC were compared between conditions using an independent samples t-test. The results showed that participants in the hurt condition did not differ significantly on their ratings of perceived relationship quality ($M = 6.17, SD = 1.02$) compared to participants in the kind condition ($M = 5.87, SD = .85$), $t(72) = 1.354, p = .177, d = .32$. Therefore, this was not included as a covariate for the main analysis and will not be discussed further.

Main Analysis

The data was analyzed using a 2x2x2 mixed ANCOVA with incident recall (hurtful, kind) as the between-subjects factor, constructiveness (voice and loyalty vs. exit and neglect) and activeness (voice and exit vs. loyalty and neglect) as the within-subjects factors controlling for time of incident¹. The likelihood rating for each response type was the dependent variable. There was a significant main effect of constructiveness of responses, $F(1, 70) = 78.261, p < .001$,

¹ Similar effects were found when analysis was conducted without the covariate.

partial $\eta^2 = .521$, and a significant main effect of activeness, $F(1, 70) = 28.809, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .286$. These main effects suggest that participants rated higher constructive responses as well as higher passive responses compared to destructive and active responses, respectively. There was no main effect of incident recall on the likelihood responses, $F(1, 70) = 2.718, p = .104$, partial $\eta^2 = .036$. Additionally, a significant interaction was found between activeness and constructiveness of responses, $F(1, 70) = 90.116, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .563$. Furthermore, a significant three-way interaction was also found between constructiveness, activeness, and incident recall, $F(1, 70) = 7.487, p = .008$, partial $\eta^2 = .097$. Post hoc tests of the simple effects were conducted, with a Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons. In the hurtful recall condition, there was significant difference between the two active responses. Participants reported significantly more voice ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.15$) than exit ($M = 2.22, SD = .78$) responses, $p < .001$. However, for the two passive responses, no differences were observed between loyalty ($M = 3.72, SD = .96$) and neglect ($M = 3.53, SD = .87$), $p = .280$. In the kind recall condition, the likelihood ratings were significantly higher for voice ($M = 4.62, SD = .93$) than exit ($M = 2.42, SD = .94$) responses, $p < .001$. Additionally, a significant difference was found for the two passive responses. Loyalty responses ($M = 4.24, SD = .93$) were reported as being more likely than neglect responses ($M = 3.59, SD = .82$), $p < .001$. The results of this interaction are displayed in Figure 1.

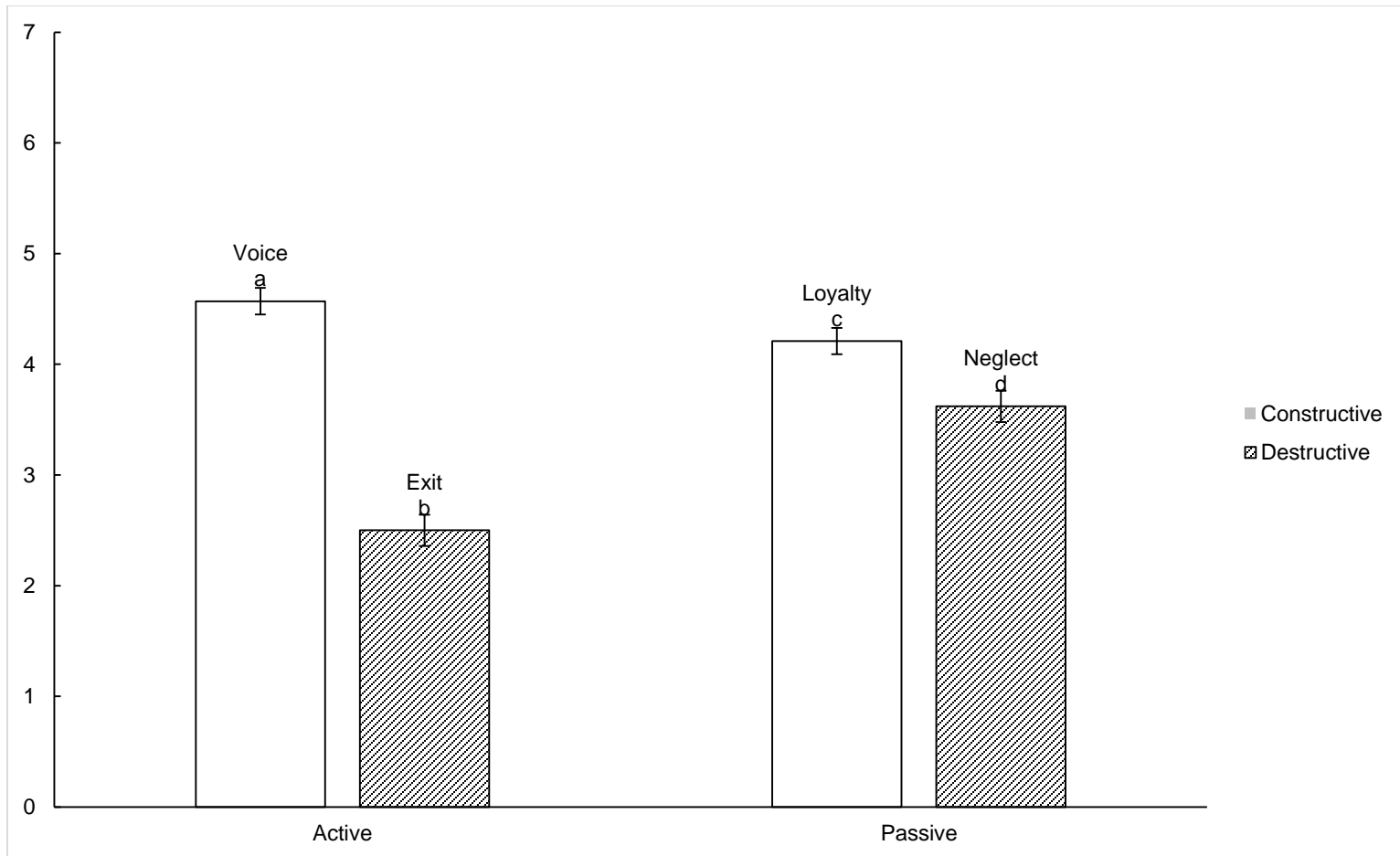


Figure 1a. Mean likelihood scores comparing activeness and constructiveness of responses for kind incident recall condition. Standard error bars are indicative of constructiveness comparison. Different letters denote significant differences between responses.

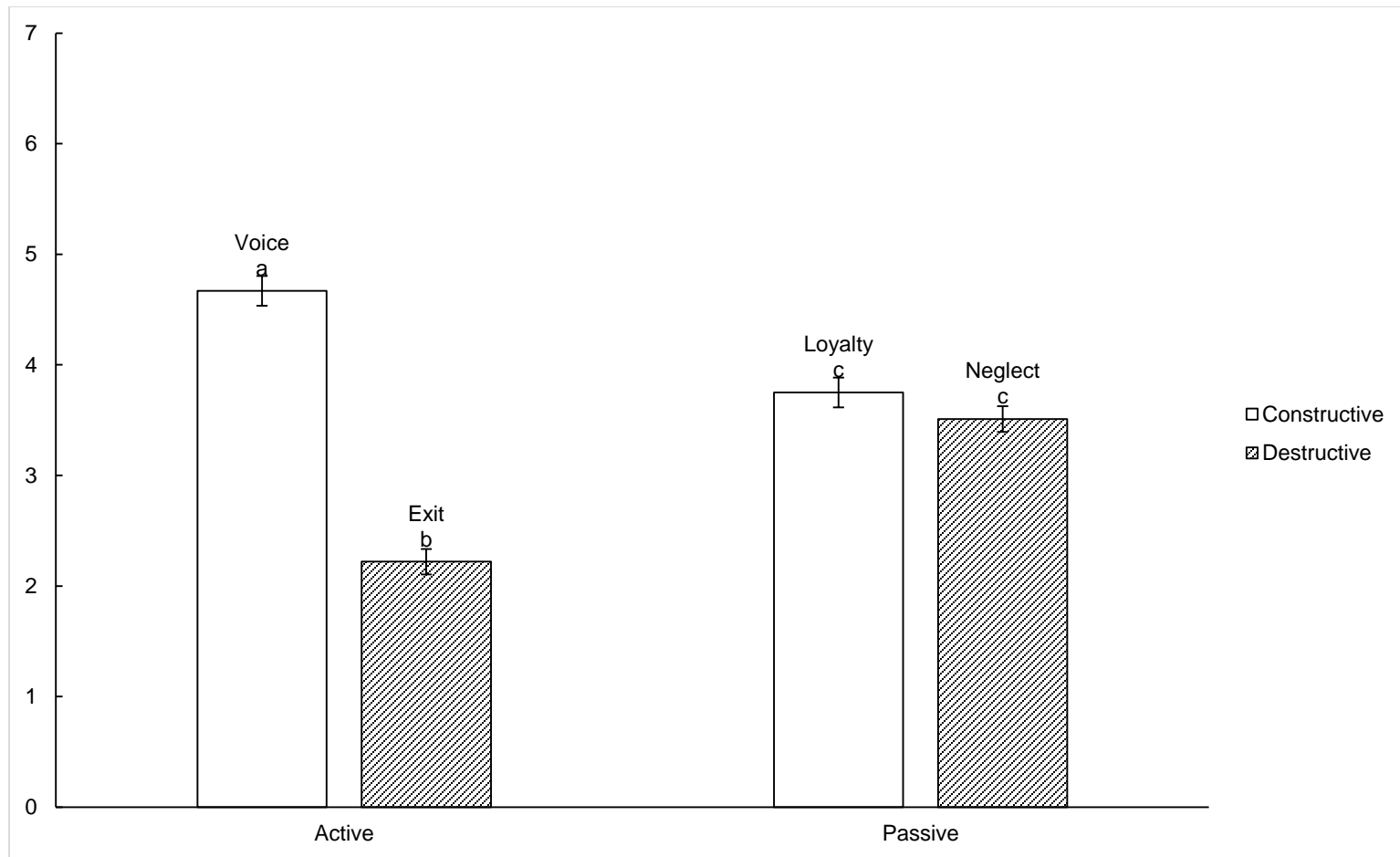


Figure 1b. Mean likelihood scores comparing activeness and constructiveness of responses for hurtful incident recall condition. Standard error bars are indicative of constructiveness comparison. Different letters denote significant differences between responses while same letters indicate no significant difference.

Discussion

The present study posits that thinking about a partner being kind or hurtful towards them in a particular instance can affect intentions to respond to hypothetical transgressions. More specifically, it was predicted that voice responses would be rated as more likely after recalling a kind incident, which was generally consistent with findings of previous studies (Rusbult et al., 1986; Finkel et al., 2002). Most interestingly, the results indicated a three-way interaction between activeness, constructiveness, and incident type as predicted, except loyalty (not voice as expected), differed between conditions. There are at least two possible explanations for these findings.

First, it is possible that thinking about a kind incident facilitates more passive constructive (loyalty) responses. Bachman and Geurrero (2006) looked at partner rewardingness and its effect on partner responses to transgressions. Partner rewardingness encompasses many different attributes about the partner, such as attractiveness, prestige, comforting, and caring. They found a positive relationship between rewardingness and constructive responses to a transgression. It is possible that thinking about a kind incident in the present study made the partner's rewardingness more salient to participants, and thus encouraged them to respond in a more forgiving and passive manner for the hypothetical transgressions. The result of the interaction is also similar to the findings of Menzies-Toman and Lydon (2005). In their study investigating the effects of commitment and appraisals on transgression responses, benign appraisals, or kind views about one's partner were related to participants reporting more constructive responses to transgressions that had occurred in their relationship. In the present study, the kind incidents may have elicited these positive views about one's partner, which in turn facilitated a tendency towards the more constructive responses.

Second, it is plausible that recalling hurtful events cause participants to not only reflect on their partner's past behaviours but their own. That is, if victims think about the past hurtful behaviour and how they reacted, they may recognize types of responses that were effective and ineffective in maintaining the relationship. This idea is supported by Rusbult et al. (1986) who had participants recall a past transgression committed by their partner, explain their response, and rate the consequences that incurred for responding in that way. Constructive responses were found to be associated with greater satisfaction, greater feelings of commitment, and resolution of the problem after the transgression. Particularly, they found that loyal responses resulted in favourable outcomes but slightly less compared to voice. Additionally, participants reported destructive responses (exit and neglect) relating to unfavourable outcomes for the relationship, as measured by satisfaction, commitment, and resolution of the problem (Rusbult et al., 1986). The results of the present study reflect a similar pattern of responses. It is possible that participants reflected on their previous responses to a past harm that resulted in the best possible outcome for their relationship, thus influencing how they would choose to respond to the hypothetical transgressions in the present study. This may be why in the hurtful condition, participants responded with more voice than exit, but no difference between neglect and loyalty.

The general tendency was to respond constructively while being less likely to respond destructively in both conditions. This suggests that the negative incident recall may not have been strong enough to cause participants to respond in a destructive way to hypothetical transgressions. This is inconsistent with the findings by Finkel et al. (2002) who found differences for destructive responses and no differences for constructive responses for the commitment manipulation. This inconsistency may be due to the quality of relationships for participants of this study. The PRQC inventory ratings indicated no difference between the

groups in regards to relationship quality and the high mean for both conditions on the PRQC indicated that participants perceived their relationship to be of high quality. Therefore, it is reasonable as to why no change was seen between both conditions for constructiveness of the responses. High quality relationships will result in more constructive responses to preserve the relationship when faced with a transgression. Furthermore, it is not likely that the reflection of a single incident, whether positive or negative, could affect a participant's overall perception of the transgressing partner or the quality of the relationship in a study such as this. The effect of the hurtful incident in this study, though rated as detrimental towards the relationship, had a mean rating close to zero. The scale was bipolar and therefore, a closer rating to zero indicated neutrality regarding the feelings after the hurtful incident. Even though they recalled a negative incident, this report indicated a tendency to report their feelings as only slightly negative, compared to being highly positive for the kind condition. This finding can be explained in regards to Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibault, 1978) and the tendency for positive perceptions within a relationship. That is, these perceptions are likely due to high quality relationships motivating partners to maintain the relationship. Additionally, this discrepancy in the ratings of how positive or negative the incident was could also relate to the hurtful incident being resolved by the time the participant completed the study.

Additionally, Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibault, 1978) can help explain the finding why individuals in the kind recall condition nominated events that were closer in time than those in the hurt recall condition. It is likely that kind incidents occurred more recently because they happen more frequently than hurtful incidents, especially in a good quality relationship. These expected kind behaviours would likely happen more recently than a transgression. Because participants were given the option to participate, it is possible that those

who are in higher quality relationships may be more willing to participate in a study about relationships. Given that the participants in the present study are in high quality relationships, it is not surprising to see more constructive responses to the hypothetical transgressions.

In the present study, it is hard to tell whether recalling a kind incident facilitates more passive/constructive responses or recalling a hurtful incident can lower passive/constructive responses without a control or neutral condition. As such, a limitation of this study is the absence of a neutral recall control. Without this control, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions in regards to whether it is the kind incident which increases loyalty responses or if it is the hurtful incident which decreases this tendency. However, it is important to note that considering the nature of many relationships, and individuals' tendencies to think about positive aspects of relationships (Kelley & Thibault, 1978; Linardatos & Lydon, 2011), a neutral recall condition would be challenging to create. This is supported by past research showing that the thought of a partner alone has been found to elicit positive perceptions of partners in participants (Linardatos & Lydon, 2011). Future research may choose to explore a way in which to include a control condition as a reference to the differences found in the present study.

Because thinking about a partner tends to elicit positive feelings, it may also be the reason why active/constructive responses tended to be higher in both the kind and hurt recall conditions. It is possible that participants were thinking of their partner, though in a negative incident, they were likely to reflect on the behaviours that occurred after and whether their partner had apologized for their wrongdoing. Some participants described reasons for their partner's behaviours in the open-ended questions, which may have tempered the pain or severity of the transgression. This suggests a direction for future research in exploring the behaviours of

both the transgressor and victim described in hurtful or kind incidents to investigate how the outcome of the incidents might affect forgiveness intentions.

Furthermore, this study assesses participants' forgiveness intentions to hypothetical transgressions. Haden and Hojjat (2006) have looked at the differences between hypothetical and actual responses to transgressions in romantic relationships. They found that participants reported more verbal aggression when considering hypothetical transgression, but when they were asked to indicate how they responded to an actual transgression, verbal aggression was less likely. The authors suggest that this reflects individuals' failure to carry out their desired behaviour in actual interactions, perhaps due to the consequences that may follow. It is possible that the participants in the present study would respond differently, by being less extreme in their types of responses in an actual transgression relative to hypothetical transgressions. There are many factors, such as the transgressor's response, which could affect how the victim handles the situation. As such, in future research, it is important to examine how past experiences affect victims' responses to transgressions following real transgressions.

The present study contributes to the forgiveness literature by showing that forgiveness responses in romantic relationships can differ after thinking of hurtful or kind incidents. Previous studies have indicated the importance of forgiveness for the well-being of the relationship, as well as the individuals involved (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, Kluwer, 2003; Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008). It is essential to highlight how loyalty responses differ depending on whether a positive or negative interaction is most salient in one's mind. Even though loyalty is more likely to occur after thinking about a kind rather than a hurtful incident, this response tendency may not be the best response for all types of transgressions, especially for transgressions that are severe and/or reoccur. The present study addresses general response

tendencies after a transgression, but these tendencies may differ when put into action rather than measured as intentions.

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