

The Relationship Between Forgiveness, Bullying, and Cyberbullying in Adolescence: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The study of bullying in adolescence has received increased attention over the past several decades. A growing body of research highlights the role of forgiveness and its association with aggression. In this article, we systematically review published studies on the association among online and traditional bullying and forgiveness in adolescents. Systematic searches were conducted in PsycINFO, MEDLINE, PsycArticles, and Scopus databases. From a total of 1,093 studies, 637 were nonduplicated studies and 18 were eventually included. Together, these studies provided evidence that forgiveness and bullying behaviors are negatively related: Adolescents with higher forgiveness levels bully less. Similarly, forgiveness is negatively related to victimization: Adolescents with higher forgiveness show less victimization. Unforgiveness was positively related to traditional and online bullying. This relationship appears to be consistent beyond types of bullying, certain background characteristics, and forgiveness measures. These findings are discussed, and clinical implications and guidelines for future research are presented.

Keywords

bullying, mental health and violence, spirituality and violence

Theoretical and empirical studies have generated substantial evidence of an important association between forgiveness and reduction of negative emotion associated with traditional and online bullying. However, there has, as yet, been no systematic review of research in this area with adolescents. To develop a better understanding of the field and to provide basis in empirical evidence for the development of theoretical and clinical guidelines, we have systematically reviewed studies that analyze the relationships between forgiveness and bullying.

Bullying and *cyberbullying* are international problems (Craig et al., 2009). Although research on bullying and cyberbullying has advanced considerably over the past decades, a major challenge facing researchers is to identify ways in which adolescents can be protected against lasting harm from bullying and cyberbullying. *Bullying* has been defined as the exposure, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions by a person or a group, which occurs under the law of silence and a dominance-submission scheme (Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Del Rey, 2015). This occurs not only in schools but also in cyberspace (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Media and communications devices have led to cyberbullying, which is defined as aggression through some electronic devices (e.g., e-mail, social networking sites, instant messages, websites; Kowalski et al., 2014; Zych et al., 2015), and which also presents specific features such as anonymity, the rapid speed of distribution, and the inability to disconnect from the virtual environment (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015). Currently, some

scholars dispute whether cyberbullying constitutes a unique form of bullying or is merely an extension of traditional bullying (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015).

Being bullied or cyberbullied has been related to a host of short- and long-term consequences for victims on their psychological and emotional adjustment (Stapinski, Araya, Heron, Montgomery, & Stallard, 2015; Zych et al., 2015). Regarding the emotional impact, traditional victimization and cybervictimization display high levels of negative emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, shame, loneliness, and embarrassment (Ortega, Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Calmamestra, & Vega, 2009). Those feelings could affect the coping strategies adopted and the impact that violence might have on adolescents' adjustment (Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Ortega-Ruiz, & Casas, 2015). In particular, most victims of traditional and online bullying were more likely to experience more negative emotions and rumination (Ak et al., 2015; Egan & Todorov, 2009) and to be engaged in aggressive and delinquent behaviors, which have been

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associated with their own increased victimization of others (e.g., Ak, Özdemir, & Kuzucu, 2015; Barboza, 2015; Sontag, Clemans, Graber, & Lyndon 2011).

Given the strong influence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying on mental health and emotional adjustment, researchers have argued that to focus solely on how to reduce bullying is not enough. The negative emotional aftermath of victimization also needs to be addressed (Ortega et al., 2012). Among personal variables thought to play an important role in coping with traditional bullying and cyberbullying, forgiveness has emerged as a potentially relevant positive resource (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016; Egan & Todorov, 2009; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Skaar, Freedman, Carlon, & Watson, 2016). The thought is that if victims of bullying can forgive, they might reduce internal rumination and also hostility and aggression toward others.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been identified as a state/situational or trait/dispositional dependent variable (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Toussaint, Worthington, & Williams, 2015). From a state or situational approach, forgiveness refers to a specific response to an interpersonal transgression, transgressor, or situation. Conversely, from the dispositional or trait perspective, forgiveness (or "forgivingness") refers to a disposition across time and situations where forgiving is an extension of a person's personality (Toussaint et al., 2015).

Forgiveness involves cognitive, affective, decisional, behavioral, motivational, and interpersonal aspects (Toussaint et al., 2015; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Researchers have used many different theoretical conceptualizations (Toussaint et al., 2015; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). The most commonly used ones are a stress-and-coping model (for a review, see Strelan, in press), an interpersonal interdependence model (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002), or an evolutionary model (McCullough, 2008). Generally, forgiveness is of two types. It is an intrapersonal decision about one's behavior toward a bully, and it is an emotional change from negative emotions and motivations to an emotionally neutral or even positive emotion regarding the perpetrator. Forgiveness is internal, and it does not interfere with a victim's pursuit of justice, which is social and societal.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of forgiveness, descriptions have included "(a) the reduction in vengeful and angry thoughts, feelings, and motives that may be accompanied (especially in stable, valued relationships) by (b) an increase in some form of positive thoughts, feelings, and motives" (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014, p. 154) toward the transgression, the perpetrator, or oneself (Toussaint et al., 2015). According to an emerging consensus among researchers, forgiveness is understood as one of many ways to cope with transgressions that have led to unforgiveness (Strelan, in press).

Research has identified benefits of forgiveness at both interpersonal and intrapersonal levels (Riek & Mania, 2012). At the

intrapersonal level, studies have linked forgiveness with increased physical and mental health (see Toussaint et al., 2015). For example, individuals higher in trait and situational forgiveness are likely to have lower levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and blood pressure, as well as less intense negative emotions, such as anger or hostility, and better sleep quality (Riek & Mania, 2012; Toussaint et al., 2015). Forgiveness is also related to psychological well-being. It is positively associated with positive affect, optimism, and life satisfaction (Toussaint et al., 2015). At the interpersonal level, forgiveness has been associated with inhibition of aggression and fewer future transgressions (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Riek & Mania, 2012). Moreover, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation, higher social support and social skills, and less revenge motivation (Toussaint et al., 2015). In the long term, those promote relationship satisfaction and stability in friendships (van der Wal, Karremans, & Cillessen, 2017).

Forgiveness and Bullying

A growing number of studies have generated substantial evidence that forgiveness might help people cope with bullying and cyberbullying (Barcaccia, Howard, Pallini, & Baiocco, 2017; Egan & Todorov, 2009; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Skaar et al., 2016). Research has shown that experiences of being bullied or cyberbullied are associated with an increased risk of stressful reactions, negative emotions, and vengeful motivations. Moreover, bullied and cyberbullied adolescents who cannot understand and manage their negative feelings, thoughts, and behaviors after being bullied often engage in more vengeful or avoidant responses to others (Kowalski et al., 2014). For instance, some authors have suggested that victims of bullying tend to take revenge on perpetrators (e.g., König, Gollwitzer, & Steffgen, 2010) to cope with the stress of being bullied and the negative emotions that it produces (Ak et al., 2015). Within the stress-and-coping framework, forgiveness is an emotion-focused coping strategy to help victims (1) alleviate negative outcomes of being bullied (e.g., Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Freedman, 2018) and (2) help those who have been bullied and those who bully deal with previous hurts (Skaar et al., 2016).

Although it is difficult to forgive a bully, it is important for victims of traditional bullies and cyberbullies to learn to forgive (or manage their unforgiveness in some other way; see Wade & Worthington, 2003). Research shows that forgiveness attenuates the stress reaction and thus might be beneficial to adolescents' psychological and physical health and their interpersonal relationships (Enright, Knutson, Holter, Baskin, & Knutson, 2007; Skaar et al., 2016). Forgiveness may help adolescents move beyond the negative effects related to the social stress of being bullied (Freedman, 2018). For instance, Flanagan, Vanden Hoek, Ranter, and Reich (2012) found that forgiveness of negative peer events that included bullying was positively associated with self-esteem, conflict resolution, support seeking, and positive coping strategies. Forgiveness was

negatively correlated with social anxiety and revenge seeking (Flanagan, Vanden Hoek, Ranter, & Reich, 2012).

Egan and Todorov (2009) also observe that forgiveness is important because it is intrapersonal, not requiring other social interaction. It is something adolescents can do on their own to cope with bullying, when bullied adolescents can use forgiveness to manage their negative feelings and stress reaction. This can lead to additional character development as they better regulate their own emotions (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Laan, 2001).

Numerous forgiveness interventions exist (for a meta-analysis, see Wade et al., 2014; for a recent review, see Wade & Tittler, in press). Few have been applied to bullying (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016). Almost all forgiveness interventions promote empathy toward the offender (Park, Enright, Essex, Zahn-Waxler, & Klatt, 2013). In bullying context, after a forgiveness intervention to help female aggressive victims, Park, Enright, Essex, Zahn-Waxler, and Klatt (2013) found improvements in their school adjustment, increases in their levels of forgiveness and empathy, and decreases in their anger, hostile attributions, and delinquent behaviors. Forgiveness education teaches adolescents to acknowledge the wrong that the offender perpetrated and to interpret social cues with less hostile bias (Freedman, 2018; Skaar et al., 2016; Watson, Rapee, & Todorov, 2015). At the same time, through forgiveness, adolescents learn to view the offender as a vulnerable human being who deserves respect, kindness, and compassion. Forgiveness increases empathy, which could prevent adolescents from aggressive and vengeful reactions (Freedman, 2018; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Toussaint et al., 2015).

Research has shown benefits of forgiveness for victims but also for both bullies and bystanders (Egan & Todorov 2009; Skaar et al., 2016). Consistent with the development of perspective taking and empathy for the transgressor (Skaar et al., 2016), promoting forgiveness leads adolescents to manage their negative emotions, actions, and thoughts to deal with previous social transgressions (Hui, Tsang, & Law, 2011). For instance, forgiveness education helps offenders to take responsibility for their actions (Skaar et al., 2016). At the same time, offenders might benefit by receiving their victims' forgiveness (Skaar et al., 2016). According to Ahmed and Braithwaite (2006, p. 351), feeling that peers think of the perpetrator more empathically and compassionately and that they do not hold resentment, the perpetrator "will assume an attitude of responsibility for the well-being of the victim in the future."

In brief, forgiveness has positive implications for promoting harmonious values in schools, strengthening youths' skills and competencies in interpersonal relationships, and reducing school and online bullying (Hui et al., 2011; Skaar et al., 2016). However, forgiveness research on the contexts likely to lead to bullying and cyberbullying are on the rise. However, to our knowledge, findings from such studies in the field have not yet been systematically reviewed. Thus, there is a deficit in linking the advancement of empirical studies on forgiveness with both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Qualitative approaches to synthesizing empirical knowledge can help to eliminate this deficit by providing a global vision on how

forgiveness is related to bullying. Therefore, this present systematic review has been conducted to fill the gaps in knowledge on the forgiveness in response to bullying and to provide a global panorama of forgiveness as one of the many ways in which adolescents can be protected against lasting harm from bullying and cyberbullying.

Aims

Negative outcomes occur with both bullying and cyberbullying. Forgiveness can ameliorate negative outcomes. When bullying occurs, forgiveness can help investigators understand some mechanisms by which victims cope, some ways bullies can reduce their aggressive behavior, and some factors to consider in designing programs to (1) prevent traditional bullying and cyberbullying and (2) manage aggression. However, each study has examined only a small part of these putative advantages of promoting forgiveness in situations in which bullying has occurred. The complexity of existing studies suggests that a systematic review of research is needed to illuminate relationships among variables, guide future research, and inform practical interventions to reduce the incidence and effects of bullying and cyberbullying. Consideration is needed across different theoretical conceptualizations, forms of bullying, and cultural contexts. In our review, we thus investigated evidence regarding forgiveness in both traditional and online bullying contexts. Our main aim of this systematic review of studies is to examine and summarize the current published literature about the relationship between forgiveness and bullying (both traditional bullying and cyberbullying) among adolescents. As such, we aimed to examine the following questions: (a) What is the relationship between forgiveness and traditional bullying/cyberbullying? (b) What is the relationship between forgiveness and psychological adjustment after bullying and cyberbullying? (c) Is the relationship between forgiveness and traditional bullying and cyberbullying consistent across forgiveness measures?

Method

Data Sources

The literature search and selection were carried out in accordance with the guidelines developed by Perestelo-Pérez (2013) and the preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) group (Moher et al., 2015). These guidelines provide a commonly accepted series of methodological considerations and the steps to follow to prepare a systematic review. The search strategy was conducted exhaustively from July 1, 2018, to July 15, 2018, in the following databases: PsycINFO, MEDLINE, PsycArticles, and Scopus. We believed these four databases to be sufficient to cover the published empirical literature. We did not include Google Scholar, which tends to identify more unpublished and nonreviewed sources (e.g., presentations, dissertations, chapters, and books). Relevant articles were tagged when they contained, as key words or words in the title or abstract, all variations of the terms "bullying" "cyberbullying" or

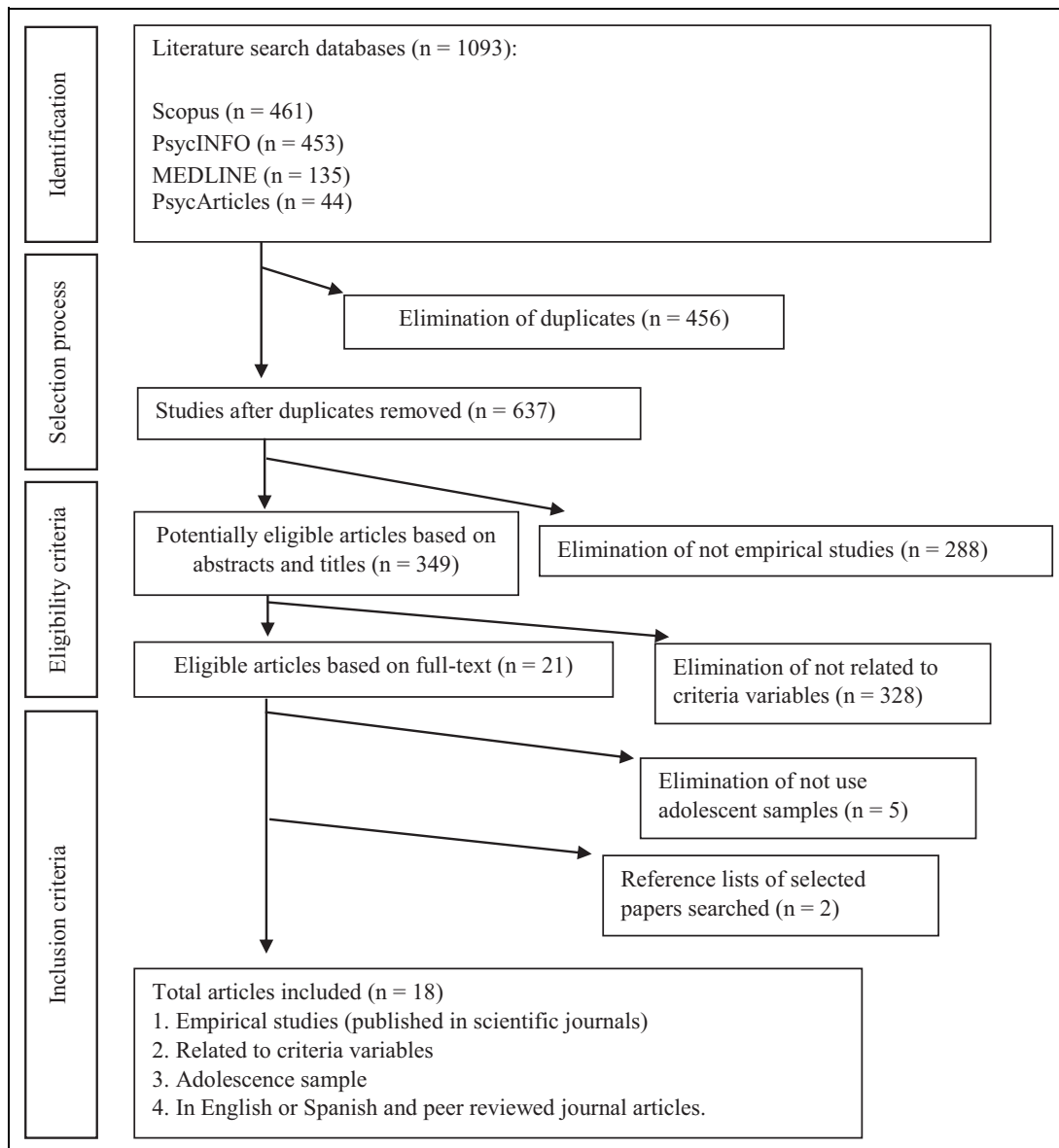


Figure 1. Flowchart of study selection process for inclusion in the systematic review.

“victimization” (i.e., “bull*”, “cyberbull*”, “victim*”, “cybervictim*”) simultaneously with all variations of the word forgiveness (i.e., “forgiv*”). In addition, the reference lists of the studies were reviewed to identify additional relevant studies.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included in the review if (a) they included direct measures of forgiveness and either bullying or cyberbullying, (b) the participants were 18 years old or less (which fitted the definition of adolescent by the World Health Organization, 2018) and were drawn from a general population, (c) the research used an empirical design or surveys (thus theoretical papers, reviews, and meta-analyses were excluded), and (d) they were limited to articles published in English or Spanish in peer-reviewed journals (which were the languages spoken by the authors).

Exclusion criteria were unpublished research, conference presentations, theses, or dissertations. While many such sources often produce research of excellent quality and while publication biases against null findings have been identified, masked review of published works provides a standard vetting that is probably more uniform than relying on local thesis committees or conference committees.

See Figure 1 for PRISMA-P (Moher et al., 2015), which illustrates our selection strategy. The databases searched identified a total of 1,093 articles: 461 in Scopus, 453 in PsycINFO, 135 in MEDLINE, and 44 in PsycArticles. Of these, 456 duplicate studies were excluded and 637 potential studies were screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. We excluded 288 articles on the basis of their title and abstract, where it was clear that the article was not reporting quantitative analysis of primary data (e.g., reviews, meta-analysis,

Table 1. Forgiveness Measures Used in the Selected Studies.

Forgiveness Measure	Forgiveness Type	Brief Description	Item Example
Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C; Enright et al., 2007)	States of forgiveness: feelings (F), behavior (B), and cognition (C)	30-Item 5-point Likert-type scale (originally 60 items based on EFI; Enright, Rique, & Coyle, 2000)	“I feel friendly” (F) “I do not talk to him or her” (B) “I think he or she is mean” (C)
Forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others scale (FSFO, Mauger et al. 1992)	Trait of forgiveness: Forgiveness of self (FS) and forgiveness of others (FO)	30-Item T/F Scale	—
Forgivingness Questionnaire (FQ; Mullet et al., 2003)	Trait forgiveness: lasting resentment (LR), forgiveness (F), and revenge (R)	12-Item 7-point Likert-type scale (originally 18 items)	“I feel unable to forgive even if the offender has begged for forgiveness” (LR) “I can truly forgive even if the consequences of harm are serious” (F)
Perceived forgiveness (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005, 2006)	Perceived forgiveness from their parent (the primary caregiver)	2-Item 5-point Likert-type scale	“My parent has forgiven me and given me another chance”
Scale of forgiveness (Nashori, 2012)	Emotion, cognition, and interpersonal dimensions	27 Item	—
Subscale of dispositional forgiveness (VIA-IS; Peterson & Seligman, 2004)	Trait forgiveness	10-Item 5-point Likert-type scale	“I always let bygones be bygones”
Trait Forgivingness Scale (TFS; Berry et al., 2005)	Trait forgiveness	10-Item 5-point Likert-type scale (originally 15 items)	“I have always forgiven those who have hurt me”
Transgression-related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM; McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003)	States of forgiveness (TRIM-18: R; A; B) and unforgiving motivations (TRIM-12: R; A)	18-Item 5-point Likert-type scale (6 items per subscale)	“I’ll make him or her pay” (R) “I’d withdraw from him or her” (A) “Even though his/her actions hurt me, I still have goodwill for him or her” (B)

theoretical papers). Another 328 articles were excluded following screening of their abstract and full-text sections; these exclusions were mostly due to their not having content related to the criteria variables. At the end of the process, the remaining 21 articles were full-text reviewed by two researchers to assess the validity of the options selected and reduce bias in the exclusion process. Articles were excluded because they did not include adolescents in the sample ($n = 5$). One article was included in the final analysis even though some of the data may have come from participants over 18 years of age. This article had included two samples: younger than 18 years (range: 11–17) and 18 years and older (range between 18 and 25 years old). We focused on the results of participants younger than 18 years old, according to the inclusion criteria (König et al., 2010). The reference lists of the selected articles led us to identify and include two articles that had not already been identified. The two reviewers agreed upon the final 18 articles to be included to analyze the relationship between forgiveness and bullying and/or cyberbullying.

Results

Description of the Studies

Fifteen studies focused solely on bullying. Two focused solely on cyberbullying. One assessed both bullying and

cyberbullying. Below, we discuss the findings for traditional bullying and cyberbullying in relation to forgiveness. Key information about the research included in this review is shown in Tables 2–4. In these tables, we depict the variables analyzed, features of the sample, and principal findings of each study.

In the selected studies, several papers assessed forgiveness, employing different instruments, which were grouped into state and trait categories. We used the classification schemes of Worthington et al. (2015) and Fernández-Capo et al. (2017; see Table 1). Moreover, three additional measures of forgiveness were uncovered in this systematic review. None was included in the aforementioned classifications (see Table 1). These were (1) subscale of dispositional forgiveness, which was included in the Values In Action (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); (2) perceived forgiveness from a parent (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005, 2006); and (3) emotion, cognition, and interpersonal dimensions of forgiveness (Nashori, 2012; Nashori et al., 2017). To present the results systematically, we will consider separately the studies of unforgiveness, forgiveness, and other outcomes related to bullying. The main results obtained with these measures can be found in each summarized section.

3.2. Unforgiveness Is Often a Response to Bullying

Four studies found associations between unforgiveness, applying the revenge and/or avoidance subscales of Transgression-related

Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM)-12 or adaptations, and bullying involvement in adolescents (Table 2). Similar to findings with adults transgressions (Toussaint et al., 2015), positive relationships were found between avoidance, revenge, and involvement in bullying and different indicators of psychological adjustment. Unforgiveness was dependent on sex, role in bullying (i.e., witness, victim, or not exposed), and relationship context (König et al., 2010; Nabuzoka, Rønning, & Handegård, 2009; Peets, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2013; Safaria, Tentama, & Suyono, 2016).

In general, victims were found to experience higher motives toward vengeance and avoidance than did witnesses of bullying (Nabuzoka et al., 2009). Furthermore, vengeance and avoidance were correlated with different psychological adjustment indicators (Nabuzoka et al., 2009). Among victims, higher levels of vengeance motivations were linked to higher externalizing problems (i.e., conduct problems related to aggression). With regard to avoidance, avoiding the bullies was related to lower levels of psychological and social problems among witness compared to victims. Sex differences were also found for revenge. Victimized girls reported lower vengeance motivations than did boys, and girls were more likely to report internalizing problems (i.e., emotional symptoms) and higher prosocial behaviors than were boys. Meta-analyses and qualitative reviews of forgiveness and sex have found similar results in adults with men being up to 4 times more likely to seek vengeance than are women (Miller & Worthington, 2015; Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008).

Regarding revenge, Peets, Hodges, and Salmivalli (2013) found that victims of a disliked transgressor showed higher revenge motives, as well as more negative thoughts and emotions, than did those victims hurt by a liked peer. Furthermore, König, Gollwitzer, and Steffgen (2010) found that, of traditional bullying victims, a high percentage were also cyberbullies. High scores on vengeance motivations predicted that more of a person's traditional bullies were chosen as cybervictims, regardless of sex or age. One might speculate that when a bully disempowers an adolescent victim, the victim seeks to regain a sense of power using anonymous cyberbullying to do so (rather than try to inflict insult or injury on their victims face-to-face). In cyberbullying, Safaria et al. (2016) found similar results among victims who normally did not know who committed cyberbullying against them. They, too, were more likely to retaliate against the bully to stop harassment. Moreover, anger was found as a mediator in the relationship between sociocognitive processes (i.e., attribution of transgression and rumination) and unforgiveness when hurt had been committed by a disliked peer (Peets et al., 2013).

Forgiveness Is Related to Bullying

Low unforgiveness does not always mean high forgiveness (Wade & Worthington, 2003). In the studies above, unforgiveness, evaluated using TRIM subscales assessing vengeance and avoidance motivations, contributes to involvement in subsequent bullying. In this section, nine studies looked at the effect

of forgiveness on bullying aggression and victimization. Of these, four found an effect of dispositional forgiveness, and five studies found an interaction between state forgiveness and bullying (see Table 3).

Trait forgiveness. At the dispositional level, four studies evaluated trait forgiveness using different measures. All found an effect of forgiveness on reducing bullying aggression and feelings of victimization. Two studies found that forgiveness was related to experiencing more bullying (Ogurlu & Sariçam, 2018) and cyberbullying (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018). However, this research was cross-sectional. The finding might be due to people who are bullied more having more opportunities to forgive, to bullies taking advantage of forgiving victims who are often forgiving, or to some related variable that is related to both forgiveness and bullying frequency. Ogurlu and Sariçam (2018) did not find differences in levels of forgiveness for gifted and nongifted adolescents. They found that, for victims of bullying, forgiveness was correlated with lower feelings of being victimized, less subsequent bullying, and less subsequent submissive behavior in the whole sample of adolescents. However, they suggested that forgiveness was positively related to submissive behavior in gifted students and that forgiveness (as well as submissive behavior and victimization) predicted being bullied. Quintana-Orts and Rey (2018) studied the relationship between forgiveness and cyberbullying aggression, above and beyond cybervictimization, sex, and grade. Forgiveness was a moderator in the association between cybervictimization and cyberbullying aggression: Cybervictimized adolescents with high forgiveness reported doing less cyberbullying than did those with low forgiveness.

Liu, Lu, Zhou, and Su (2013) and Van Rensburg and Raubenheimer (2015) also analyzed the association between trait forgiveness and psychological adjustment in bullying settings. Van Rensburg and Raubenheimer (2015) found that forgiveness moderated the relationship between bullying and victimization and psychopathology. Thus, bullying was linked to higher internalizing if one could rarely forgive oneself (as a trait), whereas bullying was related to higher externalizing if one could not forgive others as a trait. In line with these findings, Liu et al. (2013) found that those adolescents who were victims of bullying but who had higher levels of trait forgiveness were less vulnerable to experiencing suicidal ideation than were those with lower levels of trait forgiveness.

State forgiveness. At the state level, forgiveness by a bullied child was negatively associated with feelings of victimization (Flanagan et al., 2012; Watson et al., 2015) and with perpetrating bullying (Flanagan et al., 2012; Park et al., 2013). Flanagan et al. (2012) found that forgiveness by a bullied child was negatively associated with feelings of victimization and with subsequently perpetrating bullying. In line with this finding, Watson, Rapee, and Todorov (2015) examined the impact of receiving advice to forgive, avoid, or take revenge on victims' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions after school bullying. Participants were less angry when given the advice to

Table 2. Studies of Unforgiveness Related to Bullying.

Study	Assessment Time	Sample (N)	Forgiveness Scale	Statistical Analyses	Principal Results	Statistics
König et al. (2010)	Cross-sectional	$n = 93$ participants divided into cyberbullies and victims less than 18 years old (11–17 aged)	Transgression-related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM)-R	-Prevalence -Correlation analysis -Hierarchical regression analysis -ANOVA -Correlation analysis	-Vengefulness was a predictor for the proportion former traditional perpetrator as targets of cyberbullying, even controlling for age and sex -Victims showed higher vengeance and avoidance than did witnesses of bullying. There were gender differences. -Vengeance and avoidance were associated with psychological adjustment for victims and for witnesses	$r^2 = .62^{**}$ $\beta = .20^*$
Nabuzoka et al. (2009)	Cross-sectional	$n = 575$ (288 boys) 11–15 aged	TRIM-12	-Correlation analysis	-Victims showed higher vengeance and avoidance than did witnesses of bullying. There were gender differences. -Vengeance and avoidance were associated with psychological adjustment for victims and for witnesses	$F = 4.25^*$ $\eta^2 = .17$ (Gender \times Exposure)
Peets et al. (2012)	Cross-sectional	$n = 93$ adolescents (58 girls) divided into hurt by disliked (62) and liked (31) transgressor $M = 14.03$; $SD = .60$	TRIM-12 (adaptation)	-t test -Correlation analysis -Mediational analysis	-Victims of a disliked transgressor show higher both avoidance and revenge -Anger mediated the relationship between sociocognitive processes and unforgiveness when a disliked peer committed the transgression	$t = 7.10^{***}$ (avoidance) $t = 3.11^{**}$ (revenge) $\chi^2(4) = 3.53$ CFI = 1.00 SRMR = .04
Safaria et al. (2016)	Cross-sectional	$n = 495$ high school students (34.4% girls)	TRIM-12	-Correlation analysis -Hierarchical regression analysis	-Unforgiveness was positively related to cyberbully behaviors	$r = .26^{**}$ $\beta = -.19^*$

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TRIM-12 = Transgression-Related Inventory of Revenge and Avoidance Motivations; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual; TRIM-R = Transgression-Related Inventory of Revenge (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Studies of Forgiveness Related to Bullying.

Study	Assessment Time	Sample (N)	Forgiveness Scale	Statistical Analyses	Principal Results	Statistics
Barcaccia et al. (2017)	Cross-sectional	n = 319 adolescents (50.9% females) M = 17.05	TRIM-18	-Hierarchical stepwise multiple regression	-Avoidance and vengeance were positively related to victimization -The interaction Benevolence × Victimization and Revenge × Victimization negatively predicted depression -The interaction Revenge × Victimization negatively predicted behavior problems	r = .16** β = -1.48*** β = -2.88*** β = -1.73*
Flanagan et al. (2012)	Cross-sectional	n = 616 adolescents (46% girls). 10 and 11 months—14 and 11 months aged	EFI-C	-Correlation analysis -Two hierarchical regression analysis	-Victimization was negatively related to forgiveness. -Forgiveness was not directly associated with bullying behaviors	r = -.21*** r = -.17*** (f. feelings) r = -.23*** (f. thoughts) r = -.15*** (f. behavior) r = -.16***
Liu et al. (2013)	Cross-sectional	n = 962 adolescents (556 boys) M = 13.20; SD = .90	FQ	-Correlation analysis -Moderated hierarchical regression analyses	-Forgiveness is negatively related to victimization -Forgiveness moderated the relationship between victimization and suicidal ideation	r = -.46** r = .77**
Ogurlu and Sançam (2018)	Cross-sectional	n = 284 adolescents (142 gifted, 142 nongifted) M = 13.28	TFS	-Correlation analysis -Multiple linear regression	-In gifted adolescents, forgiveness is negatively related to bullying and positively related to victimization	r = -.46** r = .77**
Park et al. (2013)	Prospective (8-week follow-up)	n = 48 females victims (24 from seventh grade and 24 from female juvenile correctional) M = 15.79; SD = 2.09	Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (EFI-C)	-ANOVA -MANOVA	-In gifted students, forgiveness is a predictor of bullying -Forgiveness group experienced decreased aggression compared to the skill streaming and no-treatment groups	F(3, 137) = 50.55*** F(2, 42) = 10.02*** t(15) = 3.63* (aggression)
Quintana-Orts and Rey (2018)	Cross-sectional	n = 1,650 (840 girls) M = 14.10; SD = 3.22	VIA-IS	-Hierarchical regression analyses	-After the intervention, forgiveness was related to better adjustment among aggressive victims	r = -.18*** F(1, 1644) = 211.36*** β = -.20***
van Rensburg and Raubenheimer (2015)	Cross-sectional	n = 355 adolescents (47.56% boys) 14–16 aged	-FQ -FSFO	-Correlation analysis -Structural equation modeling (LISREL)	-Forgiveness moderated the relationship between cybervictimization and cyberbullying aggression -Forgiveness of self and of others were negatively associated with bullying	χ ² = 348.71, df = 70 CFI = .92 GFI = .87 RMSEA = .095
Watson et al. (2015)	Cross-sectional	n = 184 adolescents from private religious schools (104 boys) M = 13.0; SD = 1.09	TRIM-18 (adaptation)	ANOVA	-Advice to forgive was related with less anger than both vengeance and avoidance. -Advice to avoidance was more related to ignore the bully	F = 4.75** η ² _p = .026 F = 3.23*, η ² _p = .018
Walters and Kim-Spoon (2014)	Cross-sectional	n = 127 adolescents (71 boys) M = 15.28; SD = .31	TRIM-18	-Correlation analysis -Structural equation modeling	-Benevolence moderated the relationship between verbal victimization and mental health outcomes	χ ² = 7.697 CFI = .993 RMSEA = .023 Δχ ² = 3.915* Δdf = 1

Note. ANOVA = Analysis of Variance; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; EFI-C = Enright Forgiveness Inventory for Children (Enright et al., 2007); FQ = Forgiveness Questionnaire (Mullet et al., 2003); FSFO = Forgiveness of Self and Forgiveness of Others scale (Mauger et al., 1992); GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index; LISREL = Linear structural relations (software package); MANOVA = Multivariate Analysis of Variance; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; TFS = Trait Forgiveness Scale (Berry et al., 2005); TRIM-18 = Transgression-Related Inventory of Motivations (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003); VIA-IS = Subscale of dispositional forgiveness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

forgive than after being advised to avoid or take revenge against the perpetrator, whereas they were more likely to ignore the bully and carry on with their day when given advice to avoid the bully, in comparison to receiving advice to seek revenge.

Flanagan et al. (2012), Walters and Kim-spoon (2014), and Barcaccia, Howard, Pallini, and Baiocco (2017) analyzed the association between forgiveness and mental health among adolescents who were victimized by bullies. Flanagan et al. (2012) found that forgiveness predicted better psychological adjustment such as higher self-esteem and lower social anxiety. They did not find a moderating role of sex between forgiveness and the adjustment variables, as Nabuzoka, Rønning, and Handegård (2009) had found.

Similarly, Barcaccia et al. (2017) examined the mediator role of forgiveness between traditional bullying and mental health. Revenge was a strong predictor of anger and also behavior problems. The interaction between revenge and victimization predicted both depression and behavior problems. Although increased benevolence was not related to positive mental health, the interaction between benevolence and victimization predicted higher depression. For high victimization, benevolence was related to depression but not with low victimization.

Similarly, Walters and Kim-spoon (2014) found that, rather than being a protective factor for internalizing problems, high forgiveness exacerbated the effects of victimization. In particular, high benevolence motivations toward a bully increased the adverse psychological effects of verbal victimization and led to higher internalizing problems. The authors suggested that one possible explanation could be related to adolescents' conceptualizations of forgiveness. They might be excusing or condoning the victimization rather than forgiving. In addition, high revenge motivations were related to lower emotion regulation and higher internalizing symptomatology. The authors did not assess the bully's subsequent responses to the child. Perhaps if the bullied child communicated forgiveness, the offender would reoffend, which is one finding within the adult relationship literature (McNulty & Russell, 2016).

Can training in forgiveness help adolescents cope better with victimization by bullies? Park et al. (2013) showed that these findings also applied to aggressively victimized adolescents. Park et al. compared a forgiveness intervention program to both a skill-streaming program and a no-treatment control condition in two samples of female adolescents identified as aggressive victims. One group of female adolescents was in a middle school. The other group of adolescents was in a correctional facility having committed violent crimes (e.g., aggravated battery). Participants who received forgiveness education reported increases in forgiveness and empathy posttest and follow-up, and better academic performance posttest. They also reported less hostile attribution, anger, aggression, and delinquency at posttest and follow-up.

Other Outcomes of Forgiveness Are Related to Bullying

Finally, five studies examined the association between amount and severity of involvement in bullying and other measures of forgiveness (see Table 4). Similar to the above findings, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal dimensions of forgiveness—which were, in turn, related to personality traits—were negatively associated with bullying (Bollmer, Harris, & Milich, 2006; Nashori et al., 2017). Adolescents who were low on neuroticism and agreeableness (Nashori et al., 2017) or high on conscientiousness (Bollmer et al., 2006) showed higher forgiveness, or at least amount of letting go of the negative experience, which was related to less victimization (Bollmer et al., 2006) and less bullying aggression (Nashori et al., 2017). By contrast, Ramirez (2013)—based on interviews, observations, and a review of school records—did not find forgiveness to be a coping strategy explicitly mentioned by five students with a history of being bullied. However, those participants seemed to use some strategies related to forgiveness, such as redirection (i.e., integrate positive thinking), and reducing unforgiveness (i.e., stopping negative thinking, fending off bullying attacks, or hiding one's true feelings).

Finally, two studies by Ahmed and Braithwaite (2005, 2006) found that parents' perceived forgiveness of perpetrators' bullying of their child was negatively associated with bullying in adolescence (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005). Perceived forgiveness was also a statistical mediator between shame displacement and bullying (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006)—though cross-sectional data preclude making true mediational claims. In two studies, Ahmed and Braithwaite also found that liking for school (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005) and shame displacement (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006) each were statistical mediators between forgiveness and bullying.

Discussion

In the current systematic review, we analyzed 18 studies on forgiveness and bullying to seek to clarify how adolescents who were bullied did or did not use forgiveness as a coping mechanism. This is the first systematic review examining the role of forgiveness related to bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents. Taken together, the results reveal an implicit stress-and-coping model of forgiveness for adolescents. When victims react to being bullied by revenge and avoidance, they often have worse psychological adjustment and also often engage in bullying themselves. However, when they forgive the bully, they tend to have better psychological adjustment (than when they do not forgive) and to bully others less often. These results resonate with theoretical understandings and empirical findings from extant research and theory that demonstrate that forgiveness could be considered to be a coping strategy for dealing with transgressions and reducing unforgiveness in bullying context (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Skaar et al., 2016; Strelan, in press).

Within Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress-and-coping model, Worthington and Scherer (2004) argue that forgiveness

Table 4. Studies of Other Outcomes of Forgiveness Related to Bullying.

Study	Assessment Time	Sample (N)	Forgiveness Scale	Statistical Analyses	Principal Results	Statistics
Ahmed and Braithwaite (2005)	Cross-sectional	n = 1,875 adolescents (60% females) from Grades 7–10	Perceived forgiveness	-Correlation analysis -OLS regression analysis	-Perceived forgiveness was negatively associated with bullying -Forgiveness predicted less bullying -The role of liking for school in moderating the relationship between perceived forgiveness and bullying	$r = -.40^{***}$ $\beta = -.37^{***}$ $\beta = .05$ (Liking for School \times Forgiveness)
Ahmed and Braithwaite (2006)	Cross-sectional	n = 1,875 adolescents (60% females) from Grades 7–10	Perceived forgiveness	-Correlation analysis -Structural equation modeling (AMOS)	-Perceived forgiveness predicted bullying -Perceived forgiveness was a mediator between shame displacement and bullying -Shame displacement was a mediator between perceived forgiveness and bullying	$\beta = -.24^{***}$ $\beta = -.07^{**}$ $\beta = -.10^{***}$
Bollmer, Harris, and Millich (2006)	Cross-sectional	n = 99 children (50 boys) M = 11.46; SD = .97	Narrative tasks	-Correlation analysis -ANOVA	-Victims forgiveness of bully was negatively related to victimization -Forgiveness was a mediator between conscientiousness personality and victimization	$r = -.31$ $Z_{AB} = 6.03^*$
Nashori et al. (2017)	Cross-sectional	n = 214; 14–16 years old	Forgiveness (Nashori, 2012)	-Structural equation modeling AMOS	-Bullying is directly influenced by forgiveness	$\chi^2 = 212.19$, $df = 114$ RMSEA = .063
Ramirez (2013)	—	n = 5 (from 11 to 13 years old)	Observations, interviews, and a review of school records	-Qualitative analysis	-Forgiveness was not found as a coping strategy used by bullied children	t = -2.52 —

Note. AMOS= Analysis of a moment structures (software package); OLS= Ordinary least squares.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

can be seen as an emotion-focused coping mechanism, and Worthington (2006) formalized a stress-and-coping model of forgiveness in adults (see also Strelan & Covic, 2006). Worthington and Scherer (2004) list four propositions of the stress-and-coping theory of forgiveness including (1) injustices and unforgiveness activate stress responses; (2) forgiveness is one of many strategies to cope with injustices and unforgiveness; (3) forgiveness reduces the stress of unforgiveness; and (4) coping through forgiveness is related to health.

Specifically, according to Worthington's (2006) model for adults, transgressions are interpersonal stressors (Step 1). Stressors may lead to appraisals (Step 2). Appraisals might be of threat or challenge. That appraisal depends on the perceived balance of demands to cope that the offense makes versus the resources available to cope with the offense. Appraisals might also include the perception of degree of injustice experienced, called an injustice gap (Worthington, 2006). The interpersonal stressors create different physiological, cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and emotional stress reactions (Step 3). Then, people cope (Step 4) by problem-focused coping to deal with the stressor, emotion-focused coping to reduce the negative emotions (with forgiveness being one emotion-focused coping method), and meaning-focused coping in which meaning of the offense is sought within the relational context (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Coping (recursively) affects the stressor, the appraisals, or the stress reactions. Some of those coping mechanisms may result in poor health outcomes (Worthington, 2005; Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007). Others may result in better health (Toussaint et al., 2015).

As we have seen in the review of empirical studies on forgiveness by adolescents who are bullied, the victim, the perpetrators, and even bystanders can affect the coping through positive stress-reducing actions. These might include (for perpetrators) apology, expressions of remorse, amends making, and promises not to reoffend and (for bystanders) social support. Coping, however, can be impaired (by the victim's own actions) by exacting revenge on the bully, which tends to create a revenge-revenge reciprocity; avoiding and hoping the bullying will stop, which is often interpreted as weakness and encourages more bullying; tattling, which can result in loss of social esteem among peers and instigate revenge from bullies; or displacing the aggression onto other hapless victims often through cyberbullying (Watson et al., 2015). Perpetrators can interfere with coping also by continuing to abuse or escalating abuse. Bystanders can interfere through sharing negative complaints that increase negative emotion without suggesting any way out. In an Indonesian context, Kurniati, Damariyanti, Worthington, and Dwiwardani (2019) found that shared rumination—in which children and adolescents who were friends with a victim of bullying agreed upon maladaptive responses to an offense—produced responses that were not prosocial. The shared rumination moved children and adolescents toward higher levels of revenge. Such efforts to share negative ruminations socially often occur within the person's family, friendship, or religious community network. Also, bystanders can

give inappropriate social support and advice (like attack the perpetrator; as Watson et al., 2015, showed). That advice sometimes can lead toward internalizing and externalizing difficulties that make maladjustment more likely.

We see that, based on the foregoing review of empirical studies, the adult stress-and-coping model of forgiveness seems applicable to adolescents who have been bullied. The adolescent model seems to require few adjustments from the adult model. Emotional forgiveness can be seen as an emotion-focused coping strategy whereby victims of a transgression replace negative unforgiving emotions (i.e., bitterness, anger, etc.) with positive other-oriented emotions (e.g., love, empathy, compassion), which might increase health-promoting processes (Toussaint et al., 2015; Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005). Viewed through a stress-and-coping framework, bullying is the interpersonal transgression that adolescents appraise to be a threat and they perceive themselves as a victim. A strong threat appraisal will likely lead victimized adolescents to experience an unforgiving emotional reaction, which can involve negative emotions such as resentment, bitterness, anger, fear, hostility. Unforgiveness is related to motivations like avoiding the bully or seeking vengeance against the perpetrator (Egan & Todorov, 2009).

Using forgiveness as a coping mechanism was found to have many positive and a few negative effects for adolescents who had been bullied. These positive effects included feeling less like a victim (Bollmer et al., 2006), fewer negative emotions like depression (Barcaccia et al., 2017) or suicidal ideation (Liu, Lu, Zhou, & Su, 2013), less psychopathology (van Rensburg & Raubenheimer, 2015), less actual revenge on perpetrators (Flanagan et al., 2012) even though sometimes having higher revenge motives toward the perpetrator (König et al., 2010; Nabuzoka et al., 2009; Peets et al., 2013), better mental health outcomes (Barcaccia et al., 2017), fewer internalizing and externalizing behavioral manifestations (Nabuzoka et al., 2009), and less displacement bullying onto others (Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018).

Research suggests that more education and intervention needs to focus on helping adolescents develop social and emotional abilities and on helping both offenders and victims cope with the effects of bullying. Thus, forgiveness is argued to be an effective emotion-focused coping strategy that can reduce the sense of threat appraisal and the level of unforgiving emotions and motivations in a bullying context (Egan & Todorov, 2009; Skaar et al., 2016). However, there could be differences that may be considered between both dispositional capacities and state responses of forgiveness when coping with bullying (Toussaint et al., 2015). Within a bullying context, trait forgiveness may predispose adolescents to perceive less state unforgiveness, less motivation to revenge or to avoid, and more state forgiveness, which in turn leads to better adjustment and less desire to get back at the perpetrator by being an aggressor (bully) back at the perpetrator or displacing the aggression onto someone else (i.e., bullying someone else in response to having been bullied; König et al., 2010; Park et al., 2013; Peets et al., 2013; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Safaria et al., 2016; Watson

et al., 2015). This, in turn, can decrease health and psychological problems linked to be bullied or being a bully and increase psychological and health adjustment (Barcaccia et al., 2017; Böllmer et al., 2006; Flanagan et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Nabuzoka et al., 2009; van Rensburg & Raubenhaimer, 2015). We did find (see Walters & Kim-spoon, 2014) that the bully's subsequent behavior might further affect a forgiving child. If the bully continues to abuse the child, the child might respond with even more vengeful or avoidant motives and look for more opportunities to pay back the bully directly or indirectly, or even to aggress against (through bullying) other children. While such increased likelihood of violence and aggression is not a prosocial outcome, evolutionary psychology has shown that it can reduce eventual bullying by punishing the bully (see Burnette, McCullough, Van Tongeren, & Davis, 2012; McCullough, 2008).

In sum, research has sought to examine more in depth the relationship between forgiveness and victimization, as well as forgiveness and bullying behaviors by analyzing whether other variables may influence these relationships. Negative emotions and unforgiving motivations proved to be positively related to the proportion of victims of bullying and/or cyberbullying who turn into bullies and even choose a prior traditional perpetrator as target for cyberbullying (König et al., 2010; Peets et al., 2013; Quintana-Orts & Rey, 2018; Safaria et al., 2016; Watson et al., 2015). By contrast, adolescents with higher forgiveness were usually less involved in aggressive behavior (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005, 2006; Nashori et al., 2017; Ogurlu & Sançam, 2018; Park et al., 2013; van Rensburg & Raubenhaimer, 2015; Watson et al., 2015; cf. Walters & Kim-spoon, 2014). In addition, they were more forgiving of others and were perceived by others as more forgiving. They also used advice from others to respond to bullying with forgiveness. They felt more self-forgiveness for their misdeeds. In this sense, we suggest that, after adolescents experience a transgression that is impossible or difficult to take direct action to remove, the adolescents often use forgiveness as an emotion-focused coping strategy. That strategy can be taught and would allow students to “both acknowledge the full impact and wrongfulness of a transgression and overcome resultant emotional hurt” (Egan & Todorov, 2009).

Students' understanding of forgiveness may affect the health implications of bullying transgressions. Some research has found negative relationships between benevolence motivations and psychological adjustment (Barcaccia et al., 2017; Ogurlu & Sançam, 2018; Walters & Kim-Spoon, 2014). The context is always important. Peers who encourage revenge, people who give advice to avenge oneself, or unrelenting offenders can each work to undermine benevolent individual intentions to forgive.

Limitations of the Included Studies

These findings might suggest some ways to design programs to prevent bullying and cyberbullying. Yet limitations from the existing studies must be considered. First, most studies

involved cross-sectional designs; only two were experimental (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005; Watson et al., 2015). Causal inferences—including some claims of mediational relationships—are not supported by the studies we have reviewed.

Second, most studies assessed states of forgiveness or unforgiveness using the TRIM or its subscales. Only four studies assessed forgiveness as a trait. According to Wade and Worthington (2003), in many cases, scores on TRIM (especially the TRIM-12) are not conceptually equated with actually forgiving because the TRIM-12 measures unforgiving motives, and those unforgiving motives can be reduced through forbearance, getting justice or seeing it done, acceptance, relinquishing one's struggle to God, or even getting successful revenge. People employ many of those strategies simultaneously to reduce their unforgiveness. We suggest that researchers supplement the TRIM-12 in conjunction with other measures of forgiveness or use the TRIM-18, which includes benevolence motives, to assess whether forgiveness might have occurred (Worthington et al., 2015). An additional strategy is to complement written assessments with physiological or observed measures.

Third, only three studies considered cyberbullying. Studies taking into account cyberbullying are needed in order to gain insight into relationships between forgiveness and cyberbullying outcomes. Finally, most studies focused on victims. More studies are required to understand the roles of forgiveness in different types of involvement in bullying (e.g., bully, defender, or bully/victims), which can also be important in bullying prevention and intervention programs.

Future Research and Practical Implications

The current systematic review suggests that programs promoting forgiveness might be effective in reducing cyberbullying and bullying victimization, preventing peer aggression, and promoting psychosocial adjustment. Indeed, adolescents who experience bullying and victimization, but report greater levels of forgiveness, are more likely to report lower levels of mental health difficulties. These results—while largely correlational, not causal—can be seen as a potential first step in determining whether teaching forgiveness to cope with bullying and cyberbullying might supplant strategies such as mere avoidance of seeking revenge as an attempt to restore justice (Gollwitzer, 2009; Govier, 2002). Moreover, findings from this qualitative review also suggest that encouragement of forgiveness from family and peers is also important to the development of forgiveness in adolescence (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2005; Watson et al., 2015). Thus, whole-school forgiveness interventions, including teachers, parents and peers, may be an important bullying prevention target.

Research illustrates that more education and intervention needs to focus on helping both bullies and victims develop social and emotional skills and cope with the effects of bullying (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012; Ortega et al., 2012). Restorative practice programs suggest that the prevention and intervention of bullying might include moving forward constructively for

both the perpetrator and the victim (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012), holding individuals accountable for their behaviors within a safe and supportive space (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Morrison, 2002). Within restorative justice literature, both victims and perpetrators usually feel respected and supported. In restorative justice, neither the harm nor the perpetrator's acts are condoned. Perpetrators admit fault and typically offer to make restitution. Community members are also involved and can have a say in the relational outcomes. Offenders are held accountable for their wrongdoing, and if satisfactory negotiation of wrongdoer, victim, and community members can take place, the perpetrators are able to be reintegrated into the school community so that "they may become resilient and responsible members of the community" (Morrison, 2002, p. 3; Skaar et al., 2016). Importantly, restorative justice is a justice-focused program, not a forgiveness-focused program. Yet, in line with restorative practice programs (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2012), the perpetrator may benefit from an informal process of forgiveness as it helps the victim to recognize the fallibility of the perpetrator as a human being. Restorative justice also helps the perpetrator recognize that the victim has real feelings that are hurt (Freedman, 2018; Skaar et al., 2016; Toussaint et al., 2015). Finally, restorative justice allows community members (often family members or affected classmates) to accept the perpetrator as one who is seeking to make restitution for wrongs done (Braithwaite, 1989). Restorative justice programs, thus, can elicit respect, compassion, and empathy, which may provide the perpetrator the opportunity to reflect on their transgression and even take responsibility for the well-being of the victim in the future (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2006; Skaar et al., 2016; Toussaint et al., 2015).

Beyond social-emotional practices and restorative practices, forgiveness education provides unique aspects of managing interpersonal offenses as it addresses possible root causes of aggressive reactions and behaviors (Skaar et al., 2016). In this sense, counselors and teachers in the development of forgiveness address root causes of anger and deep hurt, developing more adaptive emotion-focused coping strategies to help perpetrators to better emotion regulation. In doing so, those who bully can learn to take responsibility for their action by understanding and managing possible underlying causes of the aggressive behavior such as unresolved feelings of anger related to a previous hurt (Skaar et al., 2016). This is in line with previous intervention programs that reported engaging in forgiveness might reduce stressful and negative responses, the risk of violence, and aggressive behaviors (Freedman, 2018; Park et al., 2013).

Some of the studies reviewed in the current research also demonstrated empirical evidence on the effect of benefits of forgiveness on mental health, suggesting that forgiveness would allow victims of bullying to engage in more effective forms of dealing with transgressions which, in turn, relates to decreasing psychological problems often related (e.g., Flanagan et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2013). Educating in forgiveness helps victims to better understand what and how a forgiveness

process is, helping them to promote a gradual change in using more positive thoughts (e.g., giving up rumination on the transgression), fewer negative emotions (e.g., anger, resentment), and more positive behaviors without necessarily excusing, forgetting, or condoning the transgression (Freedman, 2018; Skaar et al., 2016). A better knowledge of forgiveness would allow victims to work through interpersonal transgressions constructively and effectively, which serves to protect victims from future unhealthy relationships (Akhtar & Barlow, 2016). In this sense, forgiveness can help victims to learn about how a perpetrator could have come to offend through empathically taking the perpetrator's perspective. Forgiveness could also help victims display lower stress levels and healthier emotional reactions (Egan & Todorov, 2009). At the same time, helping victims recognize and manage emotions in themselves, develop empathy, appreciate the perspectives of others would prevent them from aggressive reactions and becoming bully victims.

Further work is needed to examine additional emotions or cognitive processes (e.g., coping strategies) that may influence the relationship between forgiveness and involvement in bullying and/or cyberbullying. As such, longitudinal and experimental studies are needed to establish mechanisms whereby forgiveness relates to traditional and online bullying in adolescents. For example, future longitudinal studies should address whether forgiveness increases or decreases the probability of future bullying and cyberbullying victimization. Possible cyberbullying outcomes related to forgiveness have not been addressed in the studies of this review. Future work on this association is needed. In short, further work is needed to identify moderating and mediating roles of forgiveness related to bullying and cyberbullying behaviors and victimization, and their outcomes.

Also, additional research is needed to examine forgiveness strategies as interventions to reduce bullying and cyberbullying. Only one study (Park et al., 2013) actually tested a forgiveness intervention in an attempt to decrease aggression after bullying. This was Enright and Fitzgibbons's (2015) process model of forgiveness. They compared the process model to skill streaming and no treatment. The process model resulted in less aggression than in the other conditions. Forgiveness was related to better adjustment in victims of bullying. Additional intervention studies are needed. Worthington's (2006) REACH forgiveness model has been used equally often and found to be as effective per hour of intervention as the Enright process model (for a meta-analysis, see Wade et al., 2014). Additional intervention tests need to be developed involving these two intervention programs and others.

Conclusions

This review provides some evidence of adolescents' forgiveness reactions to bullying and cyberbullying that also have implications for their psychological and psychosocial functioning, which may further contribute to the whole-school climate. According to Hui, Tsang, and Law (2011), learning to forgive—as a strength and a coping strategy—may help children and adolescents to be less likely to take revenge and retaliation

in interpersonal conflicts and to provide a more positive school culture. Therefore, psychosocial interventions to reduce bullying might include forgiveness training to promote psychological adjustment; reduce maladaptive cognitive and social skills after conflict; promote empathy; and help manage feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. A goal of antibullying programs might be to build forgiveness in adolescents to promote emotional competencies, enabling them to manage their emotions better and inhibit aggression.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research

- Better knowledge of the relationship between forgiveness and traditional and online bullying victimization would help create specific approaches to their prevention and intervention anti-bullying policies.
- The finding that the presence of unforgiveness may predict bullying behaviors among victims highlights the importance of developing forgiveness as a key role in altering the motivation of a continued cycle of aggression and negative outcomes among adolescents.
- Programs promoting forgiveness can be effective in reducing bullying victimization and aggressive behaviors, as well as in promoting psychosocial adjustment.
- More studies on the role of forgiveness on cyberbullying and on different types of involvement in bullying are required. Further work is needed to support results and to establish the mechanisms whereby forgiveness relates to involvement in bullying in adolescents.

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