Agreeableness as a Predictor of Forgiveness among Third-Party Transgressions
Lena Gerber, Sara Branch, Matt Kassner, & William Graziano
Department of Psychological Sciences
Purdue University

Introduction
The last 20 years have seen a marked increase in research on forgiveness. Psychological research has focused on precursors to forgiveness, personality processes underlying forgiveness, and the effects of forgiveness. Most work, however, focuses on a victim’s forgiveness of a transgressor. Scarce research has examined third-party forgiveness (TPF) - the tendency of close friends of victims (third parties) to be less forgiving than the victims themselves (first parties) (Green, Burnette, & Davis, 2008). The limited work that has examined TPF has done so using scenarios where the third party is closer to the victim than the transgressor which may account for the effect. The purpose of the current research was to examine TPF when the third party was equally motivated to maintain a relationship with both the victim and the transgressor. We also examined agreeableness as a potential moderator of forgiveness effects.

Study 1
The purpose of Study 1 was to replicate previous TPF research and expand on its findings by manipulating closeness to transgressor as well as victim.

Methods
Participants (N=201, 80 women) were randomly assigned to read one of two vignettes for each forgiveness situation and completed two forgiveness scales (TRIM, State Forgiveness) for each situation. Conditions varied based on the victim and the transgressor. Participants were told to imagine themselves in the situation where either a friend or stranger transgressed against either the participant or a participant’s friend. All transgressions were selected based on a pilot study where transgressions were rated as moderately severe.

Study 1 Results
There were two significant main effects for Transgressor and Victim. Participants were more likely to forgive when the transgressor was a friend (F(1, 200) = 181.44 with p = .00) and when the victim was a friend (F(1, 200) = 37.70 with p = .00).
There was a significant Transgressor x Victim interaction (F(1, 200) = 6.47 with p = .02). When the transgressor was a stranger, forgiveness was low regardless of who the victim was. However when the transgressor was a friend, a person forgave more when the transgression was against a friend.

Discussion
The current study examined the third party forgiveness effect when the third party was equally motivated to maintain a relationship with both the victim and transgressor. Results showed main effects for both transgressor and victim. Forgiveness is highest when the transgressor is a friend and the victim is a friend. Results also showed an interaction between transgressor and victim. When the transgressor is a stranger, forgiveness is low no matter the victim. But forgiveness is significantly higher when the transgressor is a friend and the transgression is against a friend. These results expand the third party forgiveness effect in stating forgiveness is still higher when the transgression is not against the person forgiving. Study 2 shows trends that manipulated closeness may have a different effect on forgiveness than authentic interpersonal closeness. When the participant was the victim, the participant was more likely to forgive the not close transgressor.

Study 2
In study 2 we wished to replicate the third-party forgiveness effect and experimentally manipulate closeness to victim and transgressor. Participants (N = 62; 31 women) signed up for a study of group dynamics and impression formation and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions:
1) Standard Forgiveness (Self as victim; Not close to transgressor) (n=16)
2) Standard Forgiveness (Self as victim; Close to transgressor) (n=18)
3) Standard TPF (Close other as victim; Not close to transgressor) (n=17)
4) Experimental TPF (Close other as victim; Close to transgressor) (n=11)

Study 2 Results
While results are not statistically significant due to sample size, trends in the data indicate that consistent with Study 1, forgiveness is greatest when a third party is close to both the victim and the transgressor.

Inconsistent with Study 1, results indicate that people were least forgiving when a close other transgressed against them. This may reflect differences in experimentally generated closeness versus authentic interpersonal closeness.

Study 2 Procedure
Demographics and Personality Inventories
(Big Five Inventory; John & Srivastava, 1999)
Closeness Generating Task (Aron, 1997)
Participants answered either small talk questions ("not close" manipulation) or closeness-generating questions (close manipulation) with confederate(s)
Negative False Feedback Manipulation
Participants were led to believe that either they (conditions 1 & 2) or one of the other group members (conditions 3 & 4) was given a negative evaluation by the transgressor.
Forgiveness Scales
After seeing the negative evaluation, participants rated the degree to which they forgave the transgressor (TRIM Scale: Mccullough, Root & Cohen, 2002)

References