

The Psychology of Forgiveness

Understanding the ways people cope with interpersonal injuries

Activity

- Write about the most significant hurt you have experienced in your life
 - What happened?
 - When did this happen?
 - Who was involved?
 - What were your reactions immediately after the hurt?
 - What reactions do you still have as you think and write about the hurt now?

Activity

- Answer the following questions with the specific hurt in mind. Report on your current experience, how you feel right now.
- Use the following scale:
 - 1= strongly disagree
 - 2 = disagree
 - 3 = agree and disagree equally
 - 4 = agree
 - 5 = strongly agree

Activity

- 1= strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = agree and disagree equally
- 4 = agree
- 5 = strongly agree

1. I'll make him/her pay.
2. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
3. I want him/her to get what she deserves.
4. I am going to get even.
5. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.

Activity

- ❑ One final question:
- ❑ To what degree have you forgiven the offending person for what he/she did?

0 = Not at all
1 = Somewhat
2 = Moderately
3 = Very much
4 = Completely

What is Forgiveness?

- ❑ What is "forgiveness"
- ❑ Forgiveness is . . .
 - "replacing the bitter, angry feelings of vengefulness often resulting from a hurt, with positive feelings of goodwill toward the offender" (Wade, Bailey, & Shaffer, 2005).
 - Other definitions (on Class Notes web page).

What is Forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is NOT . . .
 - Reducing unforgiveness (Wade & Worthington, 2003)

What is “Forgiveness”?

Unforgiveness

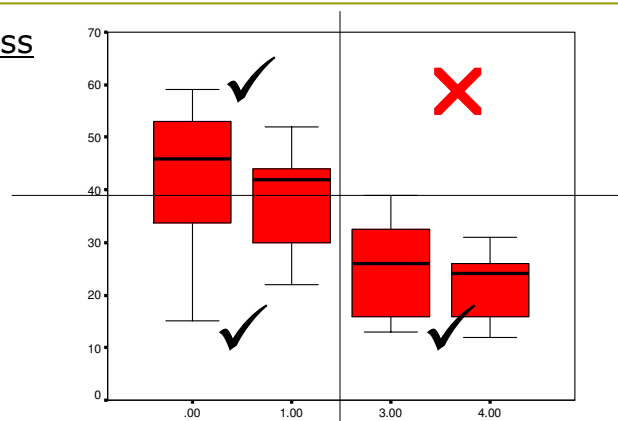
Yes

No

Forgiveness

No

Yes



(From Wade & Worthington, 2003)

What is Forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is NOT . . .
 - Reducing unforgiveness (Wade & Worthington, 2003)
 - Forgetting
 - Condoning
 - Reconciliation

What is Forgiveness?

		Reconciliation	
		No	Yes
Forgiveness	No	No Reconciliation or Forgiveness	Reconciliation without Forgiveness
	Yes	Forgiveness without Reconciliation	Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Who Forgives?

- Dispositional Factors
 - Personality
 - Agreeableness, Neuroticism, Trait forgivingness
 - Gender
- Situational Factors
 - Empathy for the offender
 - Offender apology, remorse, and regret
 - Relationship quality with the offender
 - Severity, repetition of the offense

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

- Overview of treatments
 - Individual
 - Group
 - Couples
- General research findings
 - Effective for...
 - Increasing forgiveness, hope, self esteem
 - Decreasing revenge, anger, depression, anxiety

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

□ Overview of treatment models

■ Enright's Process Model

- Uncovering Phase
- Decision Phase
- Work Phase
- Outcome Phase

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

□ Overview of treatment models

■ Worthington's REACH treatment

- R
- E
- A
- C
- H

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

- Overview of treatment models
 - Examples of interventions used at each level
 - R – guided imagery
 - E – letter from the offender
 - A – discussing times when you have been an offender
 - C – completing a certificate or other ritual
 - H – telling a trusted friend

Follow-up

- Answer the following questions with the specific hurt in mind. Report on your current experience, how you feel right now.
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Follow-up

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Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

□ Growing debate

- Are explicit “forgiveness interventions” needed?
- Empirical findings
 - Some find a difference
 - Lin et al. (2004)
 - Reed and Enright (2006)
 - Goldman and Wade (2011)

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

Results from Goldman and Wade (2011)

Treatment	Revenge			BSI		
	Pre	Post	ES	Pre	Post	ES
Forgiveness <i>n</i> = 29	9.8 (4.5)	7.8 (3.7)	.49	.74 (.65)	.42 (.55)	.51
Anger <i>n</i> = 29	9.2 (4.0)	8.3 (3.6)	.24	.71 (.55)	.62 (.53)	.17
Waitlist <i>n</i> = 24	10.6 (5.2)	9.3 (3.8)	.29	.91 (.61)	.81 (.55)	.17

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

□ Growing debate

- Are explicit “forgiveness interventions” needed?
- Empirical findings
 - Some find NO difference
 - Wade et al (2009)
 - Wade and Meyer (2009)

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

Results from Wade and Meyer (2010)

Treatment	Revenge			BSI		
	Pre	Post	ES	Pre	Post	ES
Forgiveness <i>n</i> = 11	10.4 (3.7)	7.7 (3.3)	.77	.88 (.24)	.56 (.28)	.70
Process <i>n</i> = 9	11.7 (5.5)	9.2 (4.2)	.52	1.17 (.55)	.73 (.26)	.97
Waitlist <i>n</i> = 8	12.6 (5.5)	12.7 (5.4)	.02	1.06 (.69)	1.00 (.64)	.13

Treatment to Promote Forgiveness

- Current work in this area
 - (ISU Group Counseling Study)
 - Need for more experimental control
 - A forgiveness experiment

Forgiveness and Religion

- Most religions teach forgiveness
 - Examples? (see class notes page)
 - Thus, religious people should be more forgiving
- Not consistently supported in the research
- Religion-Forgiveness Discrepancy
 - What is it?

Forgiveness and Religion

- ▣ What accounts for this discrepancy?

(Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005)

1. Measurement problems

Forgiveness and Religion

- ▣ What accounts for this discrepancy?

(Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005)

2. Using religion to justify anger and bitterness

- ▣ High standards of behavior that must be upheld

Forgiveness and Religion

□ What accounts for this discrepancy?

(Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005)

3. Different experiences/perspective on religion

- Just, angry, and punitive God images
- Forgiving, loving, and accepting God images
- Research supports this explanation

Forgiveness and Religion

□ Recent meta-analysis

- Religion and trait forgiveness
- Religion and state forgiveness
- Religion and self forgiveness

References

- Wade, N.G., Bailey, D., & Shaffer, P. (2005). Helping clients heal: Does forgiveness make a difference? *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*, 634-641.
- Wade, N.G. & Goldman, D. (2006). Sex, group composition, and the efficacy of interventions to promote forgiveness. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 10*, 297-308.
- Wade, N.G., Worthington, E.L., Jr., & Haake, S. (2009). Promoting forgiveness: Comparison of explicit forgiveness interventions with an alternative treatment. *Journal of Counseling and Development.*
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