

FORGIVENESS AND WELL-BEING IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

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Abstract

Forgiveness represents the victim's own decision to let go of anger, feelings of hatred and the desire to punish the party responsible for the harm caused (apud. Shrive, 1995). Through forgiveness, the injured person overcomes the feelings of anger and revenge (apud. Freedman & Enright, 1996). Forgiveness is a liberation from negative affections and resentment towards the source of an unjust act (apud. Thompson et al., 2005). Subjective well-being, or happiness, is defined as a person's current, cognitive, and affective assessments of their own existence. These assessments include the emotional reactions to events, as well as various cognition-based judgments regarding personal satisfaction and fulfilment.

Keywords: *forgiveness, close relationships, conflicts in relationships, well-being.*

I. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Road to Forgiveness: Situational and Dispositional Correlations "Without forgiveness there is no future."

Forgiveness represents a universal phenomenon that transcends time, cultures, and species. Speaking of forgiveness, when offered, it produces beneficial consequences for both victim and aggressor, including increased mental well-being or improved mental health. Forgiveness studies encompass a wide range of subjects, particularly the social subjects. The following question arises: When do people forgive? focusing on interpersonal forgiveness, which concerns the relationship between partners and the enhancement of well-being. The argumentation is based on the prosocial motivational transformations that the victim carries out along a cumulation of three factors: - cognitions regarding the deed and the perpetrator; - affects; - the relational and socio-moral constraints of forgiveness. If affect-related correlates refer to emotions and states, cognitive

correlates involve a process of understanding the situation itself, and the constraints outweigh the offense itself, with its results and consequences. At the same time, there are two typologies used in the analysis: the dispositional factors versus the scientific factors (Paleari et al., 2011).

2. CORRELATIONS: SITUATIONAL VS. DISPOSITIONAL

2.1. Situational correlations

- Cognitions (e.g. excuses - reparative tactics arising from the initiative of the offender).
- Affections (e.g. Empathy - characterized by emotional warmth and compassion).
- Constraints (e.g. Relational closeness, commitment, and satisfaction facilitate forgiveness by increasing motivation to save the future of the relationship, as well as awareness of the cost of continuing conflict).

2.2. Dispositional correlations

- Cognitions (e.g. agreeableness - defined as the tendency to get along well with others).
- The way of perceiving the other's perspective; Forgiveness as a trait - the tendency of the individual to forgive over time and in different situations).
- Affections (e.g. Empathic concern - as a constant personality trait, an emotional willingness to be connected in relationships with others).
- Coercion (e.g. social desirability - defined as the need for social acceptance, as well as the belief that it can only be achieved through appropriate behaviours acceptable to others).

There are some main effects in all three situations: forgiveness is directly proportional to the three correlates: cognitions, affects, constraints.

Forgiveness involves diminishing the negative emotions, improvement of physical and mental health, regaining control in the case of the victim, being a complex phenomenon that touches the affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008).

3. FORGIVENESS GENERAL FRAMEWORK: CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Forgiveness is seen as a set of motivational changes facilitated by empathy, which structurally and functionally behaves like the relationship between empathy and the altruistic motivation to be a Good Samaritan.

The restorative work supports constructive responses and avoids pursuing selfish, relationship-destructive personal goals. The inhibition of negative behaviours decreases the likelihood of future disintegration in bonds, and poor "health" is restored instead (Bono et al., 2007).

Interpersonal forgiveness represents a deliberate act of the person who has been unjustly hurt, by which he lets go of the resentment towards the aggressor, instead experiencing feelings of compassion and benevolence towards the perpetrator. Forgiveness in this sense becomes a paradoxical notion: the one who forgives lets go of the feelings to which he is entitled, and instead offers compassion, to which the offender actually has no right.

The variables that influence motivational strategies and support forgiveness-oriented attitudes determine various reparative behaviours directed toward oneself (e.g., determining motivational causality in general, gender differences) or toward the other (e.g., closeness). The pendulum between these extremes takes into account two aspects: the importance that the individual attaches to the threat to himself or rather the maintenance of the relationship at the expense of hurting his own image (Fincham et al., 2004).

The first category includes:

- Determination of motivational causality in general, described in terms of:

- autonomy (the tendency to initiate behaviours that are based on conscious choices regarding the needs, feelings or motivations of the individual),
- Control (in contrast to the former, it is the tendency to seek external control and experience events as pressure that determines behaviours and feelings), or
- Impersonal orientation (the general tendency to experience desired results as actually unattainable, while also characterized by a lack of intentionality).
- Gender differences: Men tend to be more concerned with repairing their image and less involved in restoring relationships than women.
- The attribution of blame and its benefits as a situational factor: in most situations, defensive, self-protective, justifying attitudes will be displayed in relation to the situation in which they are involved (McCullough et al., 1998).

The variables in the second category - maintaining and continuing relationships include:

- Closeness: Individuals are expected to make efforts to repair close ties to those in which they are less involved.
- Status: A high status implies a high degree of power and control, and when there is such a positioning, the degree of effort made to repair the situation increases.

We can talk about a new concept, that of restorative justice, necessary in "putting things in order and doing justice," a type of justice salient with the moment after the offense occurs. Two aspects of this notion are distinguished, located at opposite poles:

- **Revenge** - is the infliction of pain as a result of a behaviour that has in turn caused harm, frequently following a period of reflection on the injustice caused.
- **Forgiveness** - involves a reduction of negative emotions, improvement of physical and mental health, regaining control, increases well-being, being a complex phenomenon that touches the affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects (Strelan et al., 2017).

4. RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION: FORGIVENESS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE COUPLE

Forgiveness is perceived as an act of faith in that both partners are oriented towards capitalizing on the positive aspects associated with empathy and acceptance of the other.

Being benevolent and responsive to your partner's needs provides stability to the relationship and a sense of accomplishment, even when an act of infidelity has occurred. Conversely, when avoidance and retaliation take place, they derail all efforts directed at constructive problem solving.

Addressing the positive dimensions of forgiveness circumvents the negative aspects associated with forgiveness. At the same time, the advantage of avoiding some unproductive practices (e.g. arguing or withdrawing) produces positive consequences and leads to assuming a state of well-being (Wohl et al., 2008).

3.1. The relationship between marriage and well-being

The transition of couples to cohabitation (concubinage) does not have the same positive effects on well-being as the acquisition of marital status, which gives an additional dimension: the security of the home. "Being" and "staying" in a marriage increases the mental health of the partners and the satisfaction of the couple. From this perspective, it is emphasized that well-being is directly proportional to the quality of life in marriage. Thus, married people benefit from social support and integration and an increase in self-esteem.

3.2. Individual and Relational Well-being: Marriage vs. Concubinage

Subjective and relational levels of well-being are lower among concubines than among spouses. One possible explanation for this is that concubinage is not seen "kindly" by the society, there is a low level of acceptance and trust from others.

Expectations in the case of marriage are high, but intimate cohabitation is perceived as a capping, "an incomplete and useless institution" (Fehr et al., 2010).

5. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

We can formulate a number of questions about the emergence of forgiveness in relationships:

- Are women more forgiving in close relationships?
- Do adults and older people forgive their loved ones faster and easier?
- "Does time heal all wounds?"
- Is simply meditating on forgiveness enough to prevent a vengeful behaviour and enhance well-being?
- What are the factors able to discourage the implementation of revenge and destructive strategies that promote forgiveness and well-being?
- Does the process of cognitive attribution and how the person's response is strongly influenced by it also occur in the case of forgiveness?

The fact that forgiveness can improve physical and mental health is also among the recommendations made by social scientists. Similarly, forgiveness can be associated with well-being because it helps people maintain relationships based on support and trust. In short, the benefits of forgiveness on the subjective well-being of individuals represent one of the areas of research approached by psychologists lately, proponents of positive orientation in the psychological field suggesting different ways in which satisfaction can be achieved.

However, "forgiving" should not be confused with "overlooking": when one forgives, there is an accumulation of feelings that liberates the wounded, but the deed does not cease to exist. "Absolution" should also not be confused with forgiveness. "Reconciliation" can also lead to forgiveness, but the spheres of the two differ in terms of maintaining a relationship: the one who forgives will not necessarily consider a connection with the other, while "reconciliation" implies a continuity of relationships (McCullough, 2000).

II. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Case study: Forgiveness as a moderator between commitment to close relationships and partner well-being

Motivation for choosing the topic

“There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.” Bryant H. McGill

Paradoxically, the people we care about are the ones we hurt frequently and forget to say we’re sorry.

Most couples say that an orientation toward seeking and offering forgiveness is one of the most important factors contributing to the longevity of a marriage and increased marital satisfaction (Kim & Mckenry, 2022).

I. Research objectives

The research problem formulated intended to answer the following question:

- Is forgiveness a good moderator between engagement in close relationships and partner satisfaction, and a good predictor of well-being among people involved in a relationship?

II. Assumptions

1. There is a primary effect of the independent relationship, the engagement variable, on the dependent variable, well-being, in the sense that partners who have a high level of commitment to the relationship feel greater satisfaction when they overcome a marital obstacle than those with a low level of involvement.

2. There is a main effect of the independent variable readiness to forgive on the dependent variable well-being, in the sense that people with a high level of willingness to forgive will experience well-being more often than people who are not willing to forgive (revenge).

3. There is an interaction effect between the independent variable commitment in the relationship and the independent variable willingness to forgive on well-being, in the sense that people with a high level of commitment, who are willing to forgive will feel a higher level of well-being, compared to people with a low level of involvement, who are unwilling to forgive.

III. Design

- Independent variables:

V1= willingness to forgive - high;
- Low.

V2=commitment to relationship - involvement (devotion);
- Detachment.

- Dependent variable: VD = well-being.
- 2x2 design.

Table 1. Commitment to the relationship (factor 2)

		Involvement (1)	Detachment (2)
Willingness to forgive (factor 1)	High (1)	G1	G2
	Low (2)	G3	G4

IV. Method

The research method is quasi-experiment, because the independent variable V1-relationship commitment is not manipulated, only the independent variable V2-readiness to forgiveness is manipulated.

Statistical analysis used: differential inferential statistics (ANOVA).

- Participant squad

For this research, the targeted subjects are both female and male people, who have been in a stable relationship, for at least three years, but are not married, aged between 25-55 years, graduates of secondary and higher education, from the urban area.

- Tools
 - o Heartland Forgiveness Scale, Thompson, Snyder & Hoffman, 2005, 18 items.
 - It measures the willingness to forgive that an individual reports regarding a particular offense.
- Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).
 - o 2. Personal Values Questionnaire, Blackledge & Ciarrochi, 2006, 79 items (9 subscales: family relationships, friendship/ social relationships, couple/ romantic relationships, work/ career, education-school/ personal development, leisure/

- sports, spirituality/ religiosity, community spirit, health/ physical well-being).
- It measures origin (intrinsic/extrinsic), importance and commitment to values.
- Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree).
- o 3. Commitment Scale, Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998, 15 items
 - It measures the level of engagement, the level of satisfaction, the quality of alternatives and the size of the investment.
 - o 4. The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being, 2005, 84 items (long form)/ 54 items (medium form)/ 42 items (short form).
 - It measures six areas of well-being: autonomy, control over the external environment, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.
- Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) and 6 (strongly agree).

• Procedure

The subjects are presented with the topic investigated by the research: improving couple relationships;

Firstly, subjects are asked to complete a set of questionnaires (Personal Values Inventory and Engagement Scale); Then they must remember a conflicting event in the couple and how they managed it: whether they forgave / did not forgive their partner and what they felt when they acted in that manner; Visualize a time when they made a mistake and were subsequently forgiven/not forgiven;

They are then asked to complete another set of questionnaires.

V. Results

- We anticipate that subjects who are more committed to the relationship will experience a higher level of well-being when they have productively overcome a conflict situation; People with a greater willingness to forgive will be more satisfied with the relationship than those with a low willingness to forgive.
- At the same time, those with a high level of commitment, who forgive, will show increased well-being towards those who

are not involved, who do not forgive (Finkel et al., 2002).

VI. Discussions

- Forgiveness is a secular term or “secular concept” (Maugner et al., 1991), which, according to various theories, resides in the extent to which people have basic motivations towards accepting their partner and are oriented towards constructive and regulating attitudes, designed not only to maintain a functional relationship, but also to optimize its “roughness” and to fold it to the needs of the partners .
- The perpetuation of well-being is intended to anchor the partners in the relationship, resulting in increased trust, empathy and overall satisfaction, giving the couple an independent identity.
- The novelty of our study is that there are insufficient specialized studies to analyse the relationship between forgiveness and well-being in close relationships, and there is a predilection in the field to address this topic regarding same-sex couples. Most studies look separately at the topic of well-being in couples versus the topic of forgiveness in couples, but do not analyse the effects of the interaction between relationship involvement and forgiveness on satisfaction levels (McCullough et al., 1997; Fincham, 2010).

VII. Limits

- The study only looked at partners involved in heterosexual, unmarried couples; Same-sex couples are not covered. It has not been studied whether sexual orientation, along with commitment to the relationship, could represent a factor that has an effect on satisfaction in the couple.
- We did not highlight whether those in relationships who live with their partner in urban areas and those in rural areas - the pattern of life is different in the two environments - display different levels of well-being.
- We did not look at whether academic education might influence well-being based

on the attitudes toward forgiveness and the degree of involvement in a relationship (Gull & Rana, 2013; Hansen et al., 2007).

VIII. Future research directions

- New investigations into the current topic could also analyse the effect of other variables on well-being, corroborated with the forgiveness style and commitment, such as gender, age or background.
- As an objective basis for a future approach, it shall focus on the novelty effect of the new situation of research, resulting in an increased motivation of the subjects and a high level of their involvement in research.

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