Forgiveness: A Strong Antidote For Anger

Seigel Bartley, Ph.D.

Forgiveness & Anger

- Scientific research on forgiveness and anger

  - Models of forgiveness

  - Forgiveness: What is and what is not..

    - Process of forgiveness

    - Practice of forgiveness

  - Anger, justice, and forgiveness

- Coaching an angry individual through the process of forgiveness

Scientific Evidence:
Does Forgiveness Therapy Work?

Forgiveness has moved from a

controversial, rarely discussed

Intervention to a more

accepted, *legitimate form of treatment*

in psychotherapy.*

* Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000' McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000.

Research on Forgiveness and Anger

Prior to 1985, - five studies published on forgiveness*

1997 - John Templeton Foundation sponsored an initiative to fund research on Forgiveness (Exline, 2003).

2008 – Time Magazine published over 750 articles (Martens, 2013)

2013 – World Health Organization (WHO)

1986 to 2015 - SAGE and EBSCO behavioral science databases recorded 8,340 articles on Forgiveness and 2,003 articles on Forgiveness and Anger

* Cornish & Wade, 2015; Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade & Worthington, 2005; Streland, 2006

Forgiveness Therapy

Forgiveness therapy reduces anger in:

- Marriages
- Families
- Communities
- Organizations
- Societies
- Sociopolitical

Models of Forgiveness For Anger Management

Psychological Theoretical Framework	Orientation	Empirical Validation
None	Popular	Linn & Linn, 1978 – No
None	Popular	Smedes, 1984, 1996 – No
None	Popular	Coleman, 1989 – No
None	Popular	Menninger, 1996 – No

Summary of Process Models of Forgiveness

Strelan & Covic, 2006; Walker and Gorsuch, 2004

Models of Forgiveness For Anger Management

Psychological Theoretical Framework	Orientation	Empirical Validation
Moral & Cognitive Dev.	Therapeutic	Enright et al., 1996
Contextual Family Therapy	Therapeutic	Hargrave & Sells, 1997
Synthesis of Previous Models	Therapeutic	Pollard et al., 1998
Empathy–Altruism	Therapeutic	Worthington, 1998, 2001
Resolution of Unfinished Business	Therapeutic	Malcolm, 1999
Psychological Trauma	Therapeutic	Gordon & Baucom, 2003; Gordon et al., 2004

Models of Forgiveness For Anger Management

Psychological Theoretical Framework	Orientation	Empirical Validation
Object relations	Religious	Pingleton, 1997 – No
None	Religious	Cunningham, 1985 – No
None	Religious	Donnelly, 1982 – No
None	Religious	Stanley, 1987, - No
None	Religious	Rosenak & Harnden, 1992 - No

Common Constructs Across the Models

▶ **Feeling hurt** (Donnelly, 1982; Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991, 1996; Fitzgibbons, 1986)

▶ **Deciding to forgive** (Donnelly, 1982; Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991, 1996; Fitzgibbons, 1986)

▶ **Understanding the offender/empathy** (Brandsma, 1982; Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991, 1996; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Smedes, 1996; Worthington, 1998b)

▶ **Receiving God's forgiveness** (Pingleton, 1997; Stanley, 1987)

▶ **Giving up one's anger** (Augsberger, 1988; Brandsma, 1982; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Smedes, 1984, 1996; Stanley, 1987)

▶ **Forgiving oneself** (Cunningham, 1985; Donnelly, 1982; Pingleton, 1997)

▶ **Reconciling with the other person** (Enright and the Human Development Study Group, 1991; Hargrave, Sells, 1997; Pettitt, 1987; Smedes, 1984; Stanley, 1987) Walker, D. L. (2004). Dimensions underlying sixteen models of forgiveness and reconciliation. *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, *32*(1), 12-25.

Forgiveness… What Is It?

Worthington (2006) *Handbook of Forgiveness*, ask the question, *"What is Forgiveness?"*

'Forgiveness' is a complex topic that has diverse meanings among different populations, cultures, and religious traditions. It is explored from a scientific, clinical, and societal perspective. 'Forgiveness' is difficult to conceptualize because of the interdisciplinary views attributed by psychologists, counselors, theologians, philosophers, and social scientists.

Forgiveness… What It Is Not!

Condoning   Reconciliation   Self-denial

Avoiding responsibility   Forgetting

Psuedo-forgiveness   Excusing   Justifying

Forgiveness as formulated by researchers is not completely consistent with popular or ordinary usage and therefore may be contentious and/or confusing.*

* Lawler-Row, et. al. 2007; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1991, 1994; Freedman, 1998; Smedes, 1996; Veenstra, 1992 & Worthington, 2002.

Harris, A. S., Luskin, F., Norman, S. B., Standard, S., Bruning, J., Evans, S., & Thoresen, C. E. (2006).

The Process of Forgiveness

Forgiveness has many dimensions and can be very complex. Forgiveness is not always an easy nor 'straightforward' process (Christodoulidi, 2005).

A negative change in physical functioning occur when one thinks about an offender for whom he feel anger or resentment. This negative condition can be rapidly reversed when ideation is positively focused, such as in the process of forgiveness (Harris, 2006).

The Practice of Forgiveness

For Whom Do We Forgive? "Forgiveness is not always about the offender, but also the offended or the relationship. *Forgiveness serves a function!*"

Forgiveness is a motivated decision by victims of an offense to let go of their legitimate anger and resentment toward the offender and to evaluate him or her more favorably and thus it can break the link between anger and aggressive behavior (Eaton, 2006).

Henry's Story

"To forgive is
to set a prisoner free
and discover that
the prisoner was
YOU."

Lewis B. Smedes

The Practice of Forgiveness

"Forgiveness, when practiced properly, can reverse the destructive consequences of excessive anger that can result when love is withdrawn from us… forgiveness is one way of restoring a sense of love within you…" (Enright, 2012).

Anger, Justice & Forgiveness

Restorative Justice – to preserve the rights and dignity of both victims and offenders. Worthington's *"injustice gap"* (Exline, 2003).

Organizational Management – forgiveness within the workplace has helped to avert anger, rage, aggressive behavior and lawsuits (Exline, 2003).

Theology and Religion – how forgiveness is viewed and understood within various faith traditions (Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) (Exline, 2003).

Anger, Justice & Forgiveness

Psychology – defining forgiveness; process and practice of forgiveness; release of anger towards self and others (Exline, 2003).

Society – the act of forgiveness when the magnitude of a crime or when atrocities against communities (serial killings), societies, or humanity (suicide bombers). Murder victims cannot grant forgiveness to their offenders (Exline, 2003).

Coaching Others In Forgiveness

Four Stages of Forgiveness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2004)

➡ Uncovering – gaining insight into whether, and how, the injustice and subsequent injury have compromised his or her life. Confronting anger and shame. Becoming aware of potential emotional exhaustion and cognitive preoccupation. Confronting the possibility that the transgression could lead to permanent change for them. Discovering how the transgression changed their view of the world.

Coaching Others In Forgiveness

Four Stages of Forgiveness *(Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2004)*

- Decision – gaining an accurate understanding of what forgiveness is and making a decision to commit to forgiving on the bases of this understanding.

Coaching Others In Forgiveness

Four Stages of Forgiveness *(Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2004)*

➡ Work – gaining a deeper understanding of the offender and begin to view the offender in a new light (reframing), resulting in positive change in affect about the offender, about the self, and about the relationship. Showing empathy and compassion. Bearing the pain. Giving the moral gift of forgiveness.

Coaching Others In Forgiveness

Four Stages of Forgiveness *(Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2004)*

➡️ Deepening – finding meaning in the suffering (post-suffering growth). Consideration of times when we have needed other's forgiveness. Knowing that we're not alone. Becoming aware that forgiveness makes us feel more connected with others and to experience decreased negative emotion.

Forgiveness

'Forgiveness does not mean ignoring the wrong things people do or condoning them; it is about seeing the humanity in ourselves and other people and giving ourselves and others the opportunity to change.'

Lewis B. Smedes

References

Christodoulidi, F. (2005). Forgiveness and the healing process: A central therapeutic concern. *British Journal Of Guidance & Counselling*, *33*(1), 141-142. doi:10.1080/03069880412331335858

Cornish, M. A., & Wade, N. G. (2015). A therapeutic model of self-forgiveness with intervention strategies for counselors. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *93*(1), 96+. Retrieved from http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do

Eaton, J. W. (2006). The reduction of psychological aggression across varied interpersonal contexts through repentance and forgiveness. *Aggressive Behavior*, *32*(3), 195-206.

Exline, J. E. (2003). Forgiveness and justice: A research agenda for social and personality psychology. *Personality & Social Psychology Review (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates)*, 7(4), 337-348.

Garzon, F. L. (2002). Forgiveness in community cultural contexts: Applications in therapy and opportunities for expanded professional roles. *Journal Of Psychology & Christianity*, *21*(4), 349.

Harris, A. S., Luskin, F., Norman, S. B., Standard, S., Bruning, J., Evans, S., & Thoresen, C. E. (2006). Effects of a group forgiveness intervention on forgiveness, perceived stress, and trait-anger. *Journal Of Clinical Psychology*, *62*(6), 715-733. doi:10.1002/jclp.20264

Hong, Y., & Jacinto, G. (2012). Six step therapeutic process to facilitate forgiveness of self and others. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *40*(3), 366-375. doi:10.1007/s10615-011-0377-7

References

Konstam, V. S. (2001). Toward forgiveness: The role of shame, guilt, anger, and empathy. *Counseling & Values*, 46(1), 26

Lin, Y. H. (2014). Efficacy of REACH forgiveness across cultures. *Journal Of Clinical Psychology*, 70(9), 781-793.

Forgive. (n.d.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Retrieved January 29, 2015, from Dictionary.com website: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/forgive

Martens, W. H. (2013). Complex dynamics of forgiveness: Psychological, interpersonal, and psychotherapeutic implications. *International Forum Of Psychoanalysis*, 22(2), 82-94. doi:10.1080/0803706X.2011.636759

Strelan, P. T. (2006). A review of forgiveness process models and a coping framework to guide future research. *Journal Of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 25(10), 1059-1085.

Smedes, L. B. (1996). Forgive and forget: Healing the hurt we don't deserve. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (1998). Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives. Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

Silton, N. J. (2013). It pays to forgive! Aging, forgiveness, hostility, and health. *Journal of Adult Development*, 20(4), 222-231.