

Forgiveness

Background

- Generally regarded as a positive response to human wrongdoing, forgiveness is a conceptually, psychologically, and morally complex phenomenon. There is disagreement over the meaning of forgiveness
- From the ancient Greeks through the Hebrew and Christian Bibles to the present day, forgiveness has typically been regarded as a personal response to having been injured or wronged, or as a condition one seeks or hopes is bestowed upon one for having wronged someone else.
- synonyms: pardon · absolution · exoneration · remission 'forgivable,' the first entry under the general term 'forgive,' as that which "may be forgiven, pardonable, excusable," referring thereby to the quality of deserving to be forgiven.

History

- Little attention to forgiveness in early psychology
- Little attention across other disciplines (Enright and North, 1988)
- Seen as 'religious' in connotation, therefore boundaried
- Difficult to measure and analyse
- A time of conflict and atrocities

History – Part 1

(1932 – 1980)

- Piaget (1938) and Behn (1932) postulated forgiveness as a development of moral judgement
- Heider (1958) saw forgiveness as foregoing vengeful behaviour
- Rokeach (1978) forgiveness as a value

History – Part 2

(1980 to present)

- Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk (1989) suggest the capacity to forgive unfolds across the lifespan as more complex reasoning develops. There is an association between reasoning about justice and reasoning about forgiveness.
- Started to link forgiveness to mental health (e.g. Coyle & Enright, 1997; Freedman & Enright 1996).
- Research in late 1990s found people's willingness to forgive an offender can be explained by variables of a 'social-cognitive' nature, e.g. offender's perceived responsibility, intentionality, motives and severity of offence (Boan & Sulsky, 1997)

Definition

- A conclusive definition has proved problematic.
- Enright et al (1998) define forgiveness as:
"A willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgement and indifferent behaviour towards one who unjustly hurt us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him or her"
- McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen (2001) propose a definition as:
"intraindividual, prosocial change toward a perceived transgressor that is situated within a specific interpersonal context"

Philosophical

- Many contemporary philosophers argue that to continue a relationship which has been interrupted by an offence by one person upon the other, often requires a moral reassessment of the wrongdoer by the victim. Following Butler (1846), such a reassessment involves the surrendering of resentment or other forms of moral anger (French, 1982; Murphy, 1988, 2001), or behaviour such as revenge seeking or retribution (Griswold, 2007; Zaibert, 2011).
- Forgiveness is not a literal return to the state of affairs prior to the transgression, however, neither does it mean that forgiveness is merely a symbolic return to the previous state of the relationship. Rather, in granting forgiveness, a victim of wrong 're-orient's' or 're-frames' a relationship that has been disrupted or compromised by wrongdoing.

Theological

- Forgiveness has been encouraged for thousands of years by major world religions.
- Seen as yielding numerous emotional and spiritual benefits.
- Pargament and Rye (1998) propose several ways in which religion can contribute to forgiveness:
 - Seen as having a divine-like quality
 - Provides role models of individuals who have forgiven despite profound injustices
 - Can enable 'victims' to reframe their attitudes towards their offenders
 - Faith can help people cope with the uncertainty surrounding the choice to forgive
 - 'Fellowship' can support the process of forgiveness
 - Asking God for help to forgive (Pargament and Rye, 1988)

Forgiveness in different religions:

- Judaism
 - Forgiveness goes beyond pardoning or excusing someone, "the original violation is itself removed" enabling the possibility of ongoing relationship (Dorff, 2001; cited M, P & T, 2001).
- Christianity
 - "The act of pardon or release from an injury, offence or debt ... it entails having compassion, releasing someone from any act or attitude that would impede the relationship of those involved". There is usually repentance for the wrong done in the forgiven subject (Williams, 2001; cited M, P & T, 2001).

- Islam
 - “forgiveness means closing an account of offence against God or any of His creation. However, forgiveness must meet the criteria of sincerity ... Muslims understand that an offence against the creation of God is an offence against God” (Ali, 2001; cited M, P & T, 2001).
- Buddhism
 - “the notion of forgiveness comprises two factors: first, the removal of an expectation of retribution, and second the renouncing of anger or resentment toward someone who has offended you ... The Buddhist notion of forbearance embraces both enduring an action done against one and the renouncing of anger or resentment toward someone who has offended you; usually forgiveness is understood to include only the overcoming of resentment (Hallisey, 2001; cited M, P & T, 2001).

- Hinduism
 - “Ksama or ksamata is the word most commonly used to signify forgiveness. This is usually combined with words for mercy ... or compassion” (Beck, 2001; cited M, P & T, 2001)

Psychological

Robert Enright (2012)

- Forgiveness as the “foregoing of resentment or revenge”
- Instead giving the offender gifts of “mercy, generosity and love” or “beneficence” when the wrongdoer does not deserve them.
- Forgiveness does not rely upon remorse.
- Forgiveness does not have to lead to reconciliation.
- Barriers to forgiveness include:
 - Misunderstanding what forgiveness is (e.g. that to forgive is to forget; suppression of feelings like anger)
 - Absence of modelling experiences of forgiveness

Psychological - Enright

FORGIVENESS PROCESS MODEL

PRELIMINARIES

Who hurt you?
How deeply were you hurt?
On what specific incident will you focus?
What were the circumstances at the time? Was it morning or afternoon? Cloudy or sunny?
What was said? How did you respond?

PHASE 1—UNCOVERING YOUR ANGER

How have you avoided dealing with anger?
Have you faced your anger?
Are you afraid to expose your shame or guilt?
Has your anger affected your health?
Have you been obsessed about the injury or the offender?
Do you compare your situation with that of the offender?
Has the injury caused a permanent change in your life?
Has the injury changed your worldview?

PHASE 2—DECIDING TO FORGIVE

Decide that what you have been doing hasn't worked.
Be willing to begin the forgiveness process.
Decide to forgive.

PHASE 3—WORKING ON FORGIVENESS

Work toward understanding.
Work toward compassion.
Accept the pain.
Give the offender a gift.

PHASE 4—DISCOVERY AND RELEASE FROM EMOTIONAL PRISON

Discover the meaning of suffering.
Discover your need for forgiveness.
Discover that you are not alone.
Discover the purpose of your life.
Discover the freedom of forgiveness.

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Enright Forgiveness Process

Uncovering Phase

1. Examination of psychological defenses (Kiel 1986)
2. Confrontation of anger (Trainer 1981)
3. Admittance of shame, when appropriate (Pattin 1985)
4. Awareness of cathexis (Droll 1984)
5. Awareness of cognitive rehearsal of the event (Droll 1984)
6. Insight that that injured might be comparing self with the injurer (Kiel 1984)
7. Realization that one may be permanently & adversely changed by the injury (Ciose 1970)
8. Insight into a possibly altered "past world" view (Flanigan 1987)

Decision Phase

9. A change of heart, conversion, a new insight that old resolutions are not working (North 1987).
10. Willingness to consider forgiveness as an option.
11. Commitment to forgive the offender (Rebbett 1974).

Work Phase

12. Reframing, through role taking, who the wrongdoer is by viewing him or her in context (Smith 1981)
13. Empathy toward the offender (Cunningham 1985).
14. Awareness of compassion, as it emerges, toward the offender (Droll 1984).
15. Acceptance and absorption of pain (Bergin 1988).

Deepening Phase

16. Finding meaning for self and others in the suffering and forgiveness process (Frankl 1959)
17. Realization that the self has needed others' forgiveness in the past (Cunningham 1985).
18. Insight that one is not alone (universality, support).
19. Realization that the self may have new purpose in life because of the injury.
20. Awareness of decreased negative affect and, perhaps, increased positive affect if this begins to emerge toward the injurer; awareness of internal, emotional release (Bromley 1984)
