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Intrapersonal consequences of (un)forgiving: How forgiveness affects the victim

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The effects of workplace transgressions is attracting increased research attention (Jones & Burdette, 1994). Victims of transgression can respond in a number of ways. Revenge and withdrawal behaviors have received most of the attention in the organizational justice literature (Miller, 2001). However, victims can also choose to forgive the offender. Research highlights the potentially positive consequences of forgiveness on the relationship between the parties and on the perpetrators' future behavior. These *interpersonal* consequences of forgiveness are important. However the *intrapersonal* consequences of forgiveness (and lack of forgiveness) are also important. This paper reviews past research and theorizes new directions for understanding the intrapersonal consequences of forgiveness.

How does forgiveness or lack of forgiveness affect the victim? Forgiveness may affect one's physical, emotional and psychological well being as well as affect one's self-concept. These changes may, in turn, set the stage for future interactions and thereby affect one's subjective well being into the future.

Although investigations into the relationship between forgiveness and health are in the early stages (Harris & Thoresen, 2005), a number of provocative findings exist. There are physiological similarities among forgiveness and grudge-holding and stress and hostility (Farrow & Woodruff, 2005; Luskin, Thoresen, & Harris, 2001). Brain scans show relationships between unforgiveness and anger (Berry & Worthington, 2001) and stress and aggression (Pietrini, Guazzelli, Basso, Jaffe, & Grafman, 2000). In turn, anger, hostility and aggression are

associated with reduced immune functioning (Herbert & Cohen, 1993; Temshock, 2005) and cardiovascular risk (Smith, Gallo, & Ruiz, 2003).

Toussaint & Webb (2005) review findings that forgiveness fosters a sense of personal control and is related to decreased anxiety, depression, and anger.

Refusal to forgive is associated with ruminating about the offense(s) (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade 2005). These ruminations may reasonably be expected to affect future interactions with the party involved and with others, not directly involved in the original transgression. The counterfactual thinking domain finds that perceived future subjective probability is strongly related to one's ability to imagine a particular outcome as occurring. Through the simulation heuristic, future events that are easy to imagine are perceived as being likely to occur and past events that are easy to imagine are seen as "inevitable." In this way victims who ruminate about past transgressions may incorporate these events into their expectations for the future, making it easier to imagine future betrayals.

These negative expectations of the future can effect how they interact with the world generally and may foster reciprocation wariness (Eisenberger, Cotterell, & Marvel, 1987). Those who are high on reciprocation wariness are sensitive to and focused on avoiding exploitation in relationships. People high on reciprocation wariness tend to perceive others as less fair and less generous and repay people less than those low on reciprocation wariness (Eisenberger et al., 1987). High reciprocation wariness individuals also seek out and accept less help, are less likely to return help, and develop fewer close relationships than those low on reciprocation wariness (Cotterell, Eisenberger, & Speicher, 1992).

Expecting future transgressions might also lead to further transgressions through self-fulfilling prophecy effects. People tend to be very sensitive to others' expectations, living up or down to others expectations. This Pygmalion effect has been found for both positive and negative behavioral expectations. Unforgiveness may be associated with negative expectations of others, which may cause others to be more likely to live down to those expectations. Further, forgiveness might be associated with more positive views of others. These positive views of others may, in turn, elicit more positive behaviors from others.

As mentioned earlier, those who have high reciprocation wariness tend to develop fewer close relationships than those who are low on reciprocation wariness. The broaden and build model of flourishing (Tugade & Frederickson, 2004) suggests that broadening one's connections with others and one's engagement with the outside world creates a self-reinforcing cycle that enhances one's subjective well-being. It seems likely that victims who are able to forgive would be more likely to broaden and build their connections with others and the world around them while those unable to forgive may narrow and constrain their connections and thereby further reduce their subjective well-being.

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