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Personality and Individual Differences 39 (2005) 253–262

PERSONALITY AND  
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

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# Angry memories and thoughts of revenge: The relationship between forgiveness and anger rumination

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Received 19 December 2003; received in revised form 19 December 2004; accepted 17 January 2005

Available online 14 March 2005

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## Abstract

This study examined the relationship between a two-dimensional model of forgiveness and Sukhodolsky et al. (2001) 4-factor model of anger rumination among 200 university students. Angry memories were found to be the most important aspects in forgiving oneself, and dealing with revenge thoughts were found to be crucial when exploring issues around forgiving another person. The present findings suggest the importance of cognitive aspects as portrayed by Sukhodolsky et al. (2001) model of anger rumination to explore in greater depth the cognitive processes involved in forgiveness of self and others. Angry memories and thoughts of revenge: The relationship between forgiveness and anger rumination.

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*Keywords:* Forgiveness; Self; Others; Anger; Rumination

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years there has been a plethora of research examining the psychological correlates of forgiveness and its context in understanding inter-personal conflict. The main body of research has been concerned with forgiveness as it pertains to relationships with others, where the respondents are responding to questions regarding their thoughts, feelings and emotions towards a person who has transgressed against them. Rye et al. (2001) note there exist as many measures of forgiveness of others as definitions (Berry, Parrott, O'Connor, & Wade, 2001; Hargrave & Sells, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998; Subkoviak et al., 1995; Wade, 1990). The research on forgiveness of others has proved useful in distinguishing between different correlates of forgiveness and providing insights into the different psychological processes that might be involved in forgiveness (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington, 1998).

One under-used, but very useful theoretical and empirical distinction made within the psychology of forgiveness is the distinction between forgiveness of others and forgiveness of self (Mauger et al., 1992; Yamhure-Thompson & Snyder, 2003). There are a few studies examining self forgiveness. Maltby, Macaskill, and Day (2001) report a failure to forgive oneself sharing significant positive relationships with neuroticism, depression and anxiety. This view that failure to forgive oneself has detrimental effects on mental health is reported in other studies (Mauger et al., 1992). There are currently three dispositional measures of forgiveness that include forgiveness of self as well as forgiveness of others (Mauger et al., 1992; Tangney, Fee, Reinsmith, Boone, & Lee, 1999; Yamhure-Thompson & Snyder, 2003) and these have not been used extensively within any research context.

There is growing evidence to suggest that forgiveness is linked with a number of aspects of well being (Mauger et al., 1992; Salman, 2002; Subkoviak et al., 1995). Empirical research on forgiveness and mental health has largely concentrated on negative outcomes such as failure to forgive to be related to indicators of poor mental health such as depression and anxiety. (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003; Maltby et al., 2001). However there is evidence this association is more pronounced in relationships of strong rather than weak commitment and that it is the quality of the relationship before the transgression that is important. (Karremans et al., 2003). With regards to forgiveness within relationships there is a growing awareness of the usefulness of forgiveness within relationships (Ripley & Worthington, 2002) and in the clinical arena as it is often regarded as a therapeutic tool by counselors and psychotherapists (Murrey, 2002).

While it is accepted that situational and relational characteristics are likely to affect the ease with which forgiveness occurs (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Worthington, 1998; Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000b), well-being as reflected in a number of personality and individual differences dimensions also appear to be influential in determining individual willingness to forgive (Emmons, 2000). Berry et al. (2001) have suggested that one important way of conceptualizing the personality and individual difference research associated with forgiveness is to consider them in terms of whether they foster or inhibit forgiveness. Accordingly, while certain variables such as empathy and agreeableness are thought to foster forgiveness (Ashton, Paunonen, Helmes, & Jackson, 1998; Berry et al., 2001; John, 1990; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002), there are an array of variables such as neuroticism, anger, anxiety, depression, hostility and resentment that are thought to act as inhibitory variables (Davenport, 1991; Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992; Kaplan, 1992; Maltby et al., 2001; Williams & Williams, 1993; Worthington et al., 2000a). Within these latter set of find-

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