



The potential of forgiveness as a response for coping with negative peer experiences

Kelly S. Flanagan^{a,*}, Kristin K. Vanden Hoek^a, Jennifer M. Ranter^a, Holly A. Reich^b

^aWheaton College, 501 College Ave., Wheaton, IL 60187, USA

^bWright-Patterson Air Force Base, 88 MDOS/SGOWC, Wright-Patterson AFB, OH 45433, USA

A B S T R A C T

Keywords:
Forgiveness
Bullying
Victimization
Adolescence
Coping

Coping strategies employed by adolescents in response to negative peer experiences are related to their adjustment. This study examines the potential of forgiveness as a coping response for negative peer experiences in early adolescence. Participants were 616 6th through 8th grade students at a middle school (46% girls) who completed self-report measures of bullying and victimization experiences, general coping strategies in response to bullying, social anxiety, self-esteem, and a measure of forgiveness to a self-identified experience of being bullied or hurt by a peer. Forgiveness was positively associated with conflict resolution, advice and support seeking strategies, and negatively associated with revenge seeking. Forgiveness was also positively associated with concurrent self-esteem and negatively associated with social anxiety. Further, forgiveness was related to social anxiety and self-esteem after accounting for bullying behavior and victimization experiences, general coping responses, and gender. Developmental considerations of forgiveness and implications for this response are considered.

© 2012 The Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Negative peer experiences such as being teased or left out of a group, constitute a common stressor for many early adolescents associated with socio-emotional distress (Causey & Dubow, 1992; Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992; Nansel et al., 2001). School bullying in particular places many victims at risk for maladjustment, including depression, loneliness, generalized and social anxiety, and low global and social self-worth (Griffin & Gross, 2004; Hawker & Boulton, 2000). However, not all adolescents experience maladjustment. Utilizing a stress-and-coping framework, researchers are beginning to investigate the situation-specific ways in which children respond to bullying to explain these individual differences (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Lodge & Feldman, 2007; Sandstrom, 2004; Smith, Shu, & Madsen, 2001; Sontag & Graber, 2010; Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010).

Generally, coping is defined as purposeful motivational, cognitive, emotional, social and behavioral efforts undertaken to manage internal and external demands of a stressor with the goal of resolving the stressor or alleviating emotional reactions (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001; Smith et al., 2001). Youth identify negative peer experiences as stressful (Causey & Dubow, 1992). Further, individual differences exist in the coping strategies used in response to the

* Corresponding author. Psychology Department, Wheaton College, 501 College Ave., Wheaton, IL 60187, USA. Tel.: +1 630 752 5754; fax: +1 630 752 7033.

E-mail addresses: Kelly.Flanagan@wheaton.edu (K.S. Flanagan), Kristin.Vandehoek@my.wheaton.edu (K.K. Vanden Hoek), jenn.ranter@my.wheaton.edu (J.M. Ranter), holly.reich@wpfab.af.mil (H.A. Reich).

stress of negative peer experiences, and recent research shows that these responses mediate the relationship between victimization and adjustment (Sandstrom, 2004; Sontag & Graber, 2010).

A promising response to the internal and external demands of interpersonal stress is forgiveness (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 2006). Within literature regarding adults and marriages, forgiveness has been conceptualized within the stress-and-coping framework and recognized as one of many coping responses people use to deal with interpersonal conflict, perceived injustices, and the negative effects associated with unforgiveness (Worthington, 2006). Given the dynamics and salience of the early adolescent peer context, forgiveness may be an active, situation-specific response to cope with negative peer experiences including bullying (Egan & Todorov, 2009). The current study seeks to empirically examine forgiveness as a coping response to negative peer experiences.

Defining forgiveness

According to Worthington and Scherer (2004), forgiveness is a coping response employed in response to interpersonal transgressions. It is a proactive choice that empowers the victim and is independent from the actions of the offender. This choice is a distinct and complex coping response that addresses cognitive, emotional and behavioral effects of the offense. Specifically, forgiveness involves transformations within the individual, including a cessation of negative emotions, thoughts, judgments, and motivations, as well as an increase in a prosocial, constructive approach toward the offender (Denham, Neal, Wilson, Pickering, & Boyatzis, 2005; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Thus, forgiveness, as a psychosocial construct, entails both internal and external (interpersonal) aspects (Denham et al., 2005; McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000; McCullough, Pargament, et al., 2000). Internal refers to the inner experience of forgiveness through emotional and cognitive transformations, whereas the external refers to the *expression* of forgiveness in an interpersonal context. Yet, it is important to note that forgiveness is not forgetting or excusing the offense, nor does forgiveness require reconciliation.

In response to being hurt by another, individuals commonly experience a stress reaction associated with many negative emotions including anger, hatred, hostility, resentment, bitterness, fear, and anxiety (Worthington, 2006). Experimental evidence suggests that immediate negative emotions in response to an interpersonal offense and especially rumination on these negative emotions consequently is physically stressful, can create moods and mental states similar to being under chronic stress, and can damage relationships and lead to anxiety and depression (Harris & Thoresen, 2005). These negative emotions are often expressed in forms of maladaptive coping, including revenge and retaliation, seeking justice or restitution, demanding an apology, excusing or justifying the hurt, or denial and avoidance (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Hence, attempts to reduce and cope with the stress reaction might be beneficial to adolescents' overall health.

Although there are many positive coping strategies to deal with interpersonal stress reactions, research suggests that the process an individual goes through to forgive an offender is an effective coping response by which to replace or diminish the negative emotional and cognitive effects of an offense with more positive ones (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Additionally, the process may be a means of reducing the stress reaction and adopting more adaptive behavioral ways to respond. Forgiveness then, as a unique coping response, incorporates multiple regulatory subsystems (e.g., emotion, cognition, behavior) that serves multiple functions in dealing with stress (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). For example, in alignment with Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck's (2007) model, forgiveness might allow an individual to solve problems, deal with emotions, engage adaptively in the environment, and/or change or accommodate to the environment. Although theoretical considerations of forgiveness demonstrate its complexity, its potentiality as a coping response with ties to multiple regulatory processes has important implications for adolescents who are combating the negative effects of victimization or other peer experiences, as it may equip them with the necessary response that would aid in their recovery from emotional hurt, while negating the use of maladaptive coping responses (i.e., retaliation, rumination, avoidance, denial) (Egan & Todorov, 2009).

The vast majority of research documenting the benefits of forgiveness has focused on adult populations. However, presumably, some of the documented benefits may also apply to adolescents. Forgiveness has been associated with reductions in anger, depression and anxiety, and increases in self-esteem and empathy, and is also associated with restoring interpersonal relationships, promoting prosocial motivations and behavior, and enhancing social competence (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Worthington, 2006). The current study provides an initial examination of the associations between early adolescents' forgiveness of a peer and other coping strategies, as well as social anxiety and self-esteem.

Forgiveness as a coping response in the early adolescent peer context

Throughout middle childhood and into adolescence, peers become more important, peer relationships become more complex, and both intimacy and conflict tend to intensify (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz, & Buskirk, 2006). At the same time, they become more proficient with peer interactions, understanding moral rules, and focusing on maintaining positive affect and resolving conflicts (Denham et al., 2005; Parker et al., 2006). One avenue through which adolescents become more proficient in resolving conflict is through continued development and refinement of ways of coping, such as forgiveness (Seiffge-Krenke, 2011; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

Research conducted on forgiveness among children and adolescents indicates that forgiveness is utilized by youth and they are fully capable of engaging in and receiving forgiveness (Denham et al., 2005; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Park & Enright, 1997; Worthington, 2006). Further, continued cognitive and emotional maturation allows early adolescents to be more flexible in their responses to negative peer experiences. Adolescents are more adept in their ability to observe, reflect

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات