



Explaining the link between conscientiousness and forgiveness

Patrick L. Hill^{a,*}, Mathias Allemand^b

^a Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 527 Psychology Building, 603 E. Daniel St., Champaign, IL 61820, USA

^b Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Binzmühlestrasse 14/24, Zurich CH-8050, Switzerland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 18 May 2012

Keywords:

Forgiveness
Conscientiousness
Self-regulation
Adulthood

ABSTRACT

The current studies tested possible explanations for the link between conscientiousness and forgiveness. Using two Swiss adult samples, we examined three reasons why conscientious people tend to be more dispositionally forgiving. Findings suggest that self-regulation ability served as the best explanation for this relationship. Conscientious individuals tend to be better at self-regulation, which in turn enables them to be more forgiving of others. Moreover, this explanation only holds when discussing the link between forgiveness and conscientiousness, and not with respect to why agreeable and emotionally stable participants are more forgiving. Findings are discussed with respect to the role of regulatory processes in explaining the linkages between broad personality dimensions and forgiveness.

© 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

A relatively recent addition to the long literature on forgiveness is work demonstrating that some individuals are dispositionally prone to forgive others across different situations. Several studies though have now examined the personality trait of forgiveness (e.g., Brown, 2003; Brown & Phillips, 2005), a disposition that not only promotes social relationships (e.g., Maio, Thomas, Fincham, & Carnelley, 2008; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005) but also personal well-being (e.g., Hill & Allemand, 2010, 2011). When evaluating specific traits, such as forgiveness, it is valuable to test how these traits correspond to broader trait domains, in order to help connect research on the specific trait to broader literatures. For instance, it has been well-substantiated that forgiving individuals tend to score higher on measures of agreeableness and emotional stability (e.g., Balliet, 2010; Steiner, Allemand, & McCullough, 2012). While these relations are rather intuitive, meta-analytic research also has noted a significant, albeit modest positive relation between forgiveness and conscientiousness, with an average correlation of .17 (confidence interval: .11–.22; Balliet, 2010). However, it remains a largely unanswered question as to why forgiving individuals also tend to be more conscientious. And yet, examining this relationship could garner valuable insights into why conscientiousness has been linked to greater social well-being in adulthood both concurrently and longitudinally (e.g., Hill, Turiano, Mroczek, & Roberts, *in press*).

The current studies tested three different explanations for the link between conscientiousness and forgiveness, using both a sample of health care professionals, and a large sample of participants across the adult years. First, an *aging hypothesis* would

suggest that these traits become linked as a result of the aging process, given that older individuals tend to be both more conscientious and forgiving. Second, a *maturational hypothesis* would posit that conscientiousness and forgiveness are promoted when individuals enter into adult roles (e.g., marriage, parenthood, employment), and thus the correlation between these traits is due to their shared relationship with maturity. Third, a *self-regulation hypothesis* would propose that conscientiousness is linked to better self-regulation, and that to forgive others necessitates the ability to regulate one's activities and goals. Therefore, conscientious individuals might be more dispositionally forgiving because of their greater ability for self-regulation. We discuss each of these possibilities in greater detail below. However, it is worth noting that these are not mutually exclusive rationales, but rather that the link between conscientiousness and forgiveness could be due to one or more of these reasons.

The aging hypothesis

While debate exists regarding the magnitude of trait changes in adulthood, it appears that personality traits do show systematic relationships with age. For example, cross-sectional and meta-analytic work suggests that levels of conscientiousness tend to increase throughout adulthood (e.g., Allemand, Zimprich, & Hendriks, 2008b; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006). Moreover, in one study, positive relations between age and trait levels were even found when examining observer reports of conscientiousness (e.g., Jackson et al., 2009). While that study found that not all facets of conscientiousness show significant age trends, it is worth noting that those facets likely most relevant to forgiveness, such as self-control and reliability, evidenced some of the larger positive correlations with age among the facets examined.

* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 217 244 5876.

E-mail address: phill1@illinois.edu (P.L. Hill).

It then is perhaps unsurprising that older individuals tend to be more forgiving as well (see for a review, [Allemand & Steiner, 2012](#)). Indeed, it is a consistent finding that older individuals tend to report higher levels of dispositional forgiveness (e.g., [Allemand, 2008](#); [Girard & Mullet, 1997](#)), and discussing these age differences has become a prominent topic in the forgivingness literature (e.g., [Steiner, Allemand, & McCullough, 2011](#); [Steiner et al., 2012](#)). One reason why forgivingness tends to increase with age is that people often become more forgiving when they perceive less time left in their lives ([Allemand, 2008](#)). Moreover, older adults' tendency to forgive appears to be less moderated by either social pressures or mood ([Girard & Mullet, 1997](#); [Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, & Girard, 1998](#)); put differently, whether older adults forgive a transgression seems less affected by situational variables.

Both age effects coincide with the general trend for personality traits to exhibit "positive" or adaptive changes across the life course (see e.g., [Roberts et al., 2006](#)). Accordingly, the relationship between conscientiousness and forgivingness might result from their similar positive relations with age. Specifically, the aging process engenders higher levels on both traits, and thus may explain the relations between the two traits. A similar, yet alternative hypothesis is that maturation might motivate personality development on socially adaptive traits, which would include conscientiousness and forgivingness.

The maturation hypothesis

Theories of personality development have suggested that individuals tend to gain on those traits that help them adjust to adulthood (e.g., [Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008](#)). Evidence for this viewpoint comes from work demonstrating that levels of personality traits during adulthood often are yoked to commitment to adult roles, such as work, family, and community membership ([Lodi-Smith & Roberts, 2007](#)). For example, their meta-analysis found that individuals who invest more in work tend to be higher on agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Similar results were found with respect to family investments. Such relations are intuitive insofar that being agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable should allow one better success in the workplace and the home. Moreover, several of these relations hold whether examining demographic markers of social roles (e.g., married or unmarried) or looking at more psychological markers (relationship commitment), although psychological markers often demonstrate somewhat stronger effects. That said, conscientiousness was higher among individuals with demographic markers of family and work investments than those without, which constitute the two roles investigated in our studies below.

It is worth noting then that relations have been evidenced between forgivingness and markers of maturation and adaptive social relations. For example, forgiving individuals tend to score higher on identity commitment during emerging adulthood ([Hill, Allemand, & Burrow, 2010](#)). Moreover, forgivingness tends to correlate positively with social well-being indicators (e.g., [Hill & Allemand, 2010](#)), and forgiving individuals experience better marital ([Paleari et al., 2005](#)) and family ([Maio et al., 2008](#)) relations. Therefore, forgivingness appears likely to be another trait that not only benefits individuals during the maturation process, but also tends to demonstrate mean level increases during this period.

Accordingly, one can posit that the maturation process may engender a link between conscientiousness and forgivingness. One method for examining this is to test whether the two traits correlate similarly for those who have adopted adult roles (e.g., are employed, are currently married, have children) as for those adults who have not. Put differently, adult role adoption should moderate the link between conscientiousness and forgivingness, if increases on these traits are due to this common source, and thus

the relationship between these traits should be stronger amongst those currently engaged in the adult role of interest.

The self-regulation hypothesis

A final hypothesis worthy of discussion is whether conscientious individuals tend to forgive others more because of their better self-regulation skills. Conscientious individuals tend to exhibit greater impulse control, orderliness, and responsibility (e.g., [Roberts, Chernyshenko, Stark, & Goldberg, 2005](#)), traits indicative of individuals who are better at regulating their daily lives as well as their short- and long-term goals. Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that self-regulation is integral to maintaining positive social relationships (see [Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010](#) for a review). For instance, self-regulation skills predict romantic partners' sustained pro-relational behaviors, and whether they actually follow through on their promises to one another ([Kammrath & Peetz, 2011](#); [Peetz & Kammrath, 2011](#)). In addition, trait self-control predicts whether individuals avoid their impulses for revenge, and instead seek a more forgiving path for dealing with conflicts ([Balliet, Li, & Joireman, 2011](#)). Thus, conscientious individuals may experience greater relationship success, because they fair better at regulating their long-term relationship goals at the cost of adhering to immediate motives, such as revenge.

This conception of self-regulation is similar to how it is discussed from a Selection–Optimization–Compensation framework (e.g., [Freund & Baltes, 2002](#)), and in line with recent work on self-control and forgiveness in social dilemma tasks ([Balliet et al., 2011](#)). However, this view differs conceptually from the work on emotion regulation and forgiveness (e.g., [Allemand, Job, Christen, & Keller, 2008a](#)). Accordingly, while that previous work demonstrated that volitional emotion regulation mediates the link between emotional stability and forgivingness, we anticipated that self-regulation should prove a better explanation when considering why conscientious individuals are dispositionally willing to forgive. Moreover, we should note that conscientiousness is not reducible to self-regulation ability on both conceptual ([Roberts, Jackson, Fayard, Edmonds, & Meints, 2009](#); [Roberts et al., 2005](#)) and empirical grounds. For instance, our self-regulation measure was derived from work on life management strategies ([Freund & Baltes, 2002](#)), which demonstrated that, while conscientious individuals exhibited better such skills, life management strategies uniquely predicted adult well-being even when controlling for conscientiousness.

Current studies

The aim for the current studies was to test three possible explanations as to why conscientious individuals tend to be more dispositionally forgiving. First, we examined whether this link remained when controlling for the variance explained by the aging process. Second, one might expect the relationship between the traits to be moderated by adult role adoption (e.g., being married, having a job, having children), if these traits become correlated as a result of the maturation process. Third, we tested whether self-regulation ability serves to mediate the link between conscientiousness and forgivingness. Here, we employed mediation analyses primarily for explanatory purposes, rather than trying to suggest a developmental patterning for the variables.

If we find support for an explanation, the next question to ask is whether the explanation is unique to the link between forgivingness and conscientiousness. For example, forgivingness demonstrates consistent relations with agreeableness and emotional stability, which generally are stronger than its link to conscientiousness (see e.g., [Balliet, 2010](#); [Steiner et al., 2012](#)). Given that conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability all are

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