

DOES SELF FORGIVENESS PREDICT BEHAVIOR CONTROL AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS?

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explore self-forgiveness as predictor of behavior control among University Students. The total sample of the present study was one hundred and ten ($n=110$) university students including both male and female. Entire sample was selected from six departments of University of Gujrat (Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, English, Mass Communication and Economics) using convenient sampling technique. Self-Forgiveness was examined using Forgiveness of Self, a subscale of Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005), whereas Behavior Control was examined using a subscale, Behavioral Control, of Mental Health Inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983). Linear Regression Analysis reveal self-forgiveness as significant predictor of behavioral control ($\beta = .259$ ($t(108) = 2.788$, $p = .006$) among university students.

Key words: Self-Forgiveness, Behavior Control, Students, University

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Introduction

Forgiveness is a moral and psychological construct that involves conversion of negativity into positivity towards self, offender and offense. Forgiveness helps in restoring interpersonal relation and in regulating social connectivity and arrangements (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Forgiveness is closely related to religiosity, spirituality, physical and mental health (Enright, Santos & Al-Mabuk, 1989; Strelan, Acton, & Patrick, 2009; Subkoviak, et al., 1995; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003).

Researchers have come up with different concepts and dimensions of forgiveness. Thompson and associates (2005) have defined forgiveness as the “framing of a perceived transgression such that one’s responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequel of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of a transgression, and therefore the object of forgiveness, may be oneself, another person, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone’s control. It can be an illness, fate or a natural disaster”.

They have suggested three dimensions of forgiveness, forgiveness of self, other and situation. Forgiveness of self can be defined as the tendency to forgive self in response of mistake or offense one commits. Forgiveness of self involves transgression, feelings, sentiments, reasoning and relationship and forces that may instigate self-forgiving act (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

Self-forgiveness has connection with mental health, happiness and welfare. Low forgiving tendency towards self makes people anxious, depressed and irrational. On the other hand, high tendency to forgive self makes people more antagonists, less aggressive and more sympathetic (Ross, Kendall, Matter, Wrobel & Rye, 2004). People showing more forgiveness towards self also appeared to be more sociable and outgoing (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). High self-forgiveness seemed to reduce suicidal behavior (Hirsch, Webb, Elizabeth & Jeglic, 2011). Self forgiveness facilitates adjustment among women diagnosed with breast cancer (Romero et al., 2006).

Forgiveness of self was significantly associated with mental health among university students (Asgari & Roshani, 2013). Adjustment among college students was also found to be related with self-forgiveness (Macaskill et al., 2000). Basically, forgiveness of self is associated with the feelings of being offender. Having committed offense or mistakes, people are overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and shame, and more indulge in self-condemnation. As a result, they undergo stress and suffer from psychological problems. By forgiving self, they can resolve their psychological issues. Self forgiveness emphasize on self love and respect in the face of own wrongdoing (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

Significance of the Present Study

The objective of the current study is to identify the function of self-forgiveness in the context of behavior control among university students. Previously, researchers have found dispositional forgiveness being associated with self-control (DeWall, Pond, & Bushman, 2010). But self-forgiveness has not been given much importance in the field of psychology (Hall & Fincham, 2005). There is no sufficient literature that exclusively focused on self-forgiveness in respect to behavior control among university students. Furthermore, exploring factors and predictors of behavior control among students is the need of time. Owing to these reasons, the present study will be a valuable, indeed an innovative, addition in the previous literature.

Research Question

After reviewing the literature, following research question was framed to explore the self-forgiveness in the context of behavior control;

Will Forgiveness of Self significantly predict Behavior Control among University Students?

Method

Sample

One hundred and ten ($n=110$) university students including male and female were sample of the current study. Using convenient sampling method, participants were selected from six departments of the Faculty of Social Sciences (Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, Mass Communication, English and Economics) of University of Gujrat. Students

who were 21 years old or above, unmarried, not living in hostel and not having physical disability/illness were included in the present study.

Measures

Demographic Information Form was used to gather personal information of the participants including name, age, minimum educational level, marital status, socio-economic status and current residency.

Forgiveness of Self was used to measure self-forgiveness among students. Forgiveness of Self is a subscale of Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al.,2005). It comprises of 6 items. Reliability of this subscale is 0.83.

Behavior Control, a subscale of Mental Health Inventory (MHI-18) by Veit and Ware (1983) was used to measure Behavior Control among participants of the current study. It consists of 4 items with reported Cronbach's alpha of .85.

Procedure

Having permission from the Institution to initiate current research project, concerned departments were approached. Then, verbal and written consent from students of those departments was taken. Purpose and benefits of the study were briefed to them. Briefing was also given regarding procedure of responding on measures and confidentiality of provided data. Afterwards, Demographic Information Form, Subscales of Forgiveness of Self and Behavior Control were administered, in individual setting, to collect data for the current study. Instructions for responding to all three measures were also given respectively. After completing administration, students (participants) were obliged for being part of the current study.

Statistical Analysis

Linear Regression Analysis was done to examine self-forgiveness as predictor of behavior control in the presents study. In this regard, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version -16.0 was used.

Results

Table: 1

Summary of Linear Regression Analysis of Self-Forgiveness as Predictor of Behavior Control

Model	R	R ²	ΔR^2	Std. Error of the estimate
1	.259	.067	.059	3.06556

a. Predictor: (constant) Self Forgiveness

Results (Table: 1) depict significant relationship between self-forgiveness and behavior control ($R = .259\alpha$). The value of R square ($R^2 = .067$) depicted 6% proportion of variance in dependent variable that was behavior control. The value of adjusted R ($\Delta R^2 = .059$) has revealed 5% of variance in behavioral control that was accounted for self-forgiveness (independent variable). The estimated standard error is ($SE = 3.06556$).

Table: 2

Summary of ANOVA

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	73.050	1	73.050	7.773	.006
Residual	1014.950	108	9.398		
Total	1088.000	109			

- a. Predictor: (constant), Self Forgiveness
b. Dependent variable: Behavior Control

Results (Table: 2) have depicted the statistical significance of overall findings of the current analysis ($F(1, 108) = 7.773, P = .006$).

Table: 3*Summary of Coefficients*

Model	Un-standardized Coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
1 (constant)	10.639	1.591		6.685	.000
Self-Forgiveness	.166	.060	.259	2.788	.006

Dependent Variable: Behavior Control

Results (Table: 3) show that self-forgiveness has significantly predicted behavior control among participants of the current study ($\beta = .259$ ($t(108) = 2.788$, $p = .006$).

Discussion

Forgiveness and self-forgiveness are considered as integral to human condition (Arendt, 1958) because of playing significant role in psychological healing (Hope, 1987). Keeping this in view, in the current study, it was tried to explore the predictive relationship of forgiveness with behavior control. Results have shown that self-forgiveness has been emerged as significant predictor of behavior control among university students (Table: 3).

It shows that self-forgiving people can have better control over their behavior. Actually forgiveness is an intrapsychic struggle in against of internal conflict (Coleman, 1998). It helps in modifying personal beliefs that may harm to self and as well as others (Flanigan, 1992). By forgiving, a person can handle his or her thoughts, feelings and as well as behavior (Schimmel, 2002). By forgiving self, one can also control and manage self-criticism that results in improved physical and mental health.

Research evidences have revealed that high level of self-forgiveness is inversely related to mental distress (Maselko, 1998). It means, when people forgive themselves, their pessimistic attitude towards self gets changed and feelings of inadequacy, guilt and frustration are reduced.

If people keep criticizing self, there are more chances of suffering from depression, apprehension, nervousness. These problems are ultimately observed in form of outward behaviors. When these problems are under control, outward behavior is under controlled of person.

In the current study, when students forgive own self for own wrongdoings, they seemed to control their behaviors, too, along with underlying feelings of shame, guilt and frustration. Guilt has strong association with forgiveness (Friedman, 2004). Negative temperament is also involved in self-forgiveness (Ross, Hertenstein & Wrobel, 2007). It can be concluded that students who have reported more forgiveness of self, also might have controlled their negative temperament that might have contributed in controlling behavior among them.

Self forgiving people seem willing to focus on self and take responsibilities of their actions (Coleman, 1998). Forgiveness also involves the replacement of negative unforgiving emotions, feelings into positive and other oriented (Berry et al., 2005). Feelings and emotions are reflected in form of behaviors. Therefore, students of the current study seemed to consider their behavior as their sole responsibilities, became successful in replacing their negativity into positivity, when they have shown more tendency to forgive own self after committing mistakes or offense.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the current findings is that self-forgiveness predicts behavior control. Everybody can do wrong and it is necessary to forgive for the past mistakes and wrongdoings to go ahead in life. Self-forgiveness makes a person able to control his or her behavior in a particular situation. By forgiving self in response of offenses or mistakes, we can convert our negative feelings and emotions into positive one which are reflected in form of positive and controlled behavior. However, appropriate ways to forgive the self and situations in which one must forgive own self should be cleared to all of us.

Limitations/Recommendations

Though, the population of the present study was university students but sample size was small (n=110) and without controlling demographics (socio-economic status, educational level, family system). Researchers, in future, should take large sample size and consider the role of demographics in self-forgiveness and behavior control. Researchers need to focus on determinants of self-forgiveness also.

Implications for Teachers and Parents

Teachers can make their students learn to forgive own self for the mistakes they do during studies. Some students are much sensitive to criticism and are overwhelmed by feelings of guilt and shame. Teacher can make them learn to handle those negative feelings and emotions. Lack of self-forgiveness makes students emotionally disturbed that later on influence their academic performance. By forgiving self, students will be able to control their behavior in the class also.

Parents can also change their parenting style and use healthy strategies that make their children disciplined without inserting guilt and shame in their mind. Some parents do not tolerate if their children commit mistakes. This harsh parenting impedes smooth emotional and psychological growth of children. Learning to forgive self may make them able to control their behavior that may also benefit them in their academics.

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