

Forgiveness and life satisfaction across different age groups in adults

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Introduction

1. Forgiveness has the power of restoring difficult relations and improving one's well-being.
2. Forgiveness occurs as a result reframing the perceived harm and modifying person's previous assumptions about oneself, other people and the world, that have been violated by the transgression (Thompson et al., 2005).
3. Willingness to forgive changes over one's lifetime. In general, it has been found to increase with age (Girard & Mullet, 1997; Subkoviak et al., 1995; Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001), which is consistent with Erikson's psychosocial development theory.
4. Forgiveness may be a strategy for maximizing positive emotions leading to life satisfaction. The tendency to overcome unforgiveness should be important for life satisfaction during adulthood, however for people from middle adulthood to old age, positive forgiveness strategies might be required for feeling satisfied with life.

Hypotheses

1. We hypothesized an increase in the general propensity to forgive from young to elderly adults (H1).
2. We put forward a general hypothesis about positive relationships between varied dispositions to forgive and life satisfaction in different age groups (H2). We expect to find positive associations between negative facets of dispositional forgiveness and satisfaction with life among younger adults, and between positive aspects of forgiveness and life satisfaction among older respondents.

Method

Participants

- **Sample – N=436**- four age groups: (1) young adults - aged 19–30 (n= 173); (2) adults - aged 31–40 (n = 104); (3) middle-aged adults -aged 41–50 (n = 99); (4) older adults - above 50 (n =60).
- **Mean Age** =35.13 years; SD=11.90 years

Measures

- Heartland Foriveness Scale (HFS)
- Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

Analyses

- Correlation (r-Pearson)
- Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Results

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and differences in forgiveness across age groups

	All (N=436)		Young adults (n=173, aged 19-30)		Adults (n=104, aged 31-40)		Middle-aged adults (n=99, aged 41-50)		Older adults (n=60, above 50)		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
General forgiveness	82.30	12.01	79.29	12.16	82.77	11.57	84.63	11.46	86.21	11.43	7.92	.000 1<3; 1<4
Positive forgiveness (P-scale)	44.04	6.98	43.44	7.31	43.94	7.12	44.04	6.39	45.82	6.98	2.32	.074
P-self	14.93	3.10	14.63	3.24	14.95	3.10	14.90	2.97	15.77	3.00	2.61	.051 1<4
P-others	14.16	3.15	13.84	3.22	14.14	3.39	14.41	2.85	14.64	2.99	1.48	.218
P-situations	14.95	2.82	14.97	2.80	14.85	2.69	14.73	2.93	15.41	3.05	1.06	.367
Reduction of unforgiveness (N-scale)	38.24	9.58	35.85	9.26	38.83	9.75	40.59	9.61	40.39	8.68	7.10	.000 1<3; 1<4
N-self	12.48	4.50	11.57	4.64	12.86	4.57	13.51	4.11	12.75	4.16	4.57	.004 1<3
N-others	12.82	3.67	12.10	3.55	12.84	3.65	13.42	3.81	13.89	3.42	5.10	.002 1<3; 1<4
N-situations	12.95	3.82	12.19	3.52	13.13	3.99	13.66	4.09	13.75	3.54	4.56	.004 1<3; 1<4

Table 2 Pearson's correlations between forgiveness and satisfaction with life

	Satisfaction with life				
	All (N=436)	Young adults (n=173, aged 19-30)	Adults (n=104, aged 31-40)	Middle-aged adults (n=99, aged 41-50)	Older adults (n=60, above 50)
General forgiveness	.27***	.27***	.18	.34***	.27*
Positive forgiveness (P-scale)	.18***	.22**	-.03	.21*	.35**
P-self	.20***	.22**	.10	.21*	.32*
P-others	.12*	.16*	-.05	.19	.21
P-situations	.07	.15	-.13	.06	.28*
Reduction of unforgiveness (N-scale)	.21***	.18*	.23*	.26**	.07
N-self	.13**	.13	.13	.19	-.04
N-others	.14**	.16*	.14	.13	.04
N-situations	.24***	.14	.29**	.30**	.19

*p<.05;
**p<.01;
***p<.001

Discussion

1. **An increase in forgivingness from young to older adults was observed.** However, this increasing trend was reported for general forgiveness and overcoming unforgiveness, but not for positive forgiveness.
2. The results of our study confirmed **the relationships between positive and negative dimensions of forgivingness and life satisfaction.** However, there are differences in these associations depending on the age of the respondents.
 - For **young adults'** satisfaction with life, positive forgiveness as well as reduced unforgiveness are both significant. Thus, the willingness to forgive might be a significant element in the successful transition to adulthood because of the process of identity development (Erikson, 1993). It requires fruitful interactions within one's social environment, which are more successfully established by forgiving individuals.
 - Among **adults aged 31–40** willingness to forgive turned out to be of minor importance for their life satisfaction - only reduced unforgiveness, especially in situations beyond anyone's control, was related to a rewarding life.
 - Among **middle-aged adults**, forgivingness was found to be related to life satisfaction, in reference to the general forgiveness and its positive and negative dimensions. Erikson's stage of being generative in different contexts - family, relationships, work and society - brings genuine satisfaction in middle adulthood (Hamachek, 1990). Living such a productive life and contributing to society entails the ability not only to overcome resentment, but also to restore social harmony through applying the positive strategy of forgiveness (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk, 1989). In turn, being generative
 - Satisfaction with life in **older adults** is dependent on positive forgivingness. Forgiveness appears to be crucial for the complete ego integrity, especially the positive forgiveness of self and of situations, which help to accept of one's previous experiences and choices. When older people show forgiveness of self and of situations, they see their lives as productive and become satisfied. This is also possible due to older people's limited time horizon and willingness to maximize positive emotions, that allow to focus their attention on positive information, situations, and view negative information in a positive manner (Carstensen et al., 2006; Isaacowitz, Toner, Goren, & Wilson, 2008).

References

Kaleta, K., & Mróz, J. (2018). Forgiveness and life satisfaction across different age groups in adults. *Personality and Individual Differences, 120*, 17-23.

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