

Correlations of
gratitude and
forgiveness
psychology essay



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Gratitude has only been focused within the field of psychology in the past decade although historically it had been discussed at length in theology, religion and philosophy (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Looking back a little into the past, great philosophers such as Aristotle, Epicurus and La Rochefoucauld were convinced that manifestations of gratitude were due to human beings' self interest and messy emotional ties that make people unnecessarily beholden to their benefactors (Harpham, 2000; Roberts, 2000 as cited in McCullough, Emmons, Tsang, 2002). However when this topic was reintroduced into the field of scientific studies, researchers are convince that gratitude has associations with more positive outcomes than the negatives (Naito, Wangwan & Tani, 2005; Wood, Joseph, & Linley, 2007; Froh, Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009).

According to McCullough, Emmons, Tsang (2002), gratitude like other affects could exist as an affective trait, an emotion or feeling which they called gratitude disposition. It is individual's universal predisposition to distinguish and act in response with gratifying feeling to the actions of those whom provides positive experiences and outcomes. Other scholars working on dispositional gratitude believes that it is interrelate to a more optimistic and enthusiastic attitude toward life (Wood, Josph, & Maltby, 2008; Froh, Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009). There are four facets (otherwise known as elements) that influence one's gratitude disposition known as intensity, frequency, span and density which co-occurs.

The first facet of gratitude disposition is intensity that can be measure by level of thankfulness one feels upon the occurrence of positive event. An individual whom is dispositionally grateful will experience greater intensity of

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gratefulness as compared to a person whom is less disposed out of the same positive event. Frequency, the second facet can be defined as the number of times an individual feels grateful within an allocated period. Dispositionally grateful individual in general will report experiencing more grateful events a day as compared to their counterparts. Their gratitude might be cause by even the smallest favor or act of courtesy (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002).

Gratitude span (the third facet) is, at a given timeframe, the number of life circumstances a person feels grateful for. A dispositionally grateful individual will definitely have more appreciation aspects such as feeling grateful about their families, jobs, friends and even simply living life itself. The last facet of gratitude disposition is density which is reflected by the number of persons an individual feels grateful for a single positive outcome. If a dispositionally grateful person is ask who they appreciate for obtaining good exam results, the list may include many significant others such as parents, teachers, friends, neighbours, siblings (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002).

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is an action likely to draw two or more individuals, namely the offender and victim closer together as forgiving is universally recognize as a kindly act. No doubt that mounting researches on forgiveness had been carried out yet scholars are more readily to agree upon what forgiveness is not (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000). Many of them are convinced that forgiveness should be separated from justifying, pardoning, condoning and reconciliation (Rye, Loiacono, Folck, Olszewski, Heim & Madia, 2001; Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini & Miller, 2007; Fincham, 2010). Even until <https://assignbuster.com/correlations-of-gratitude-and-forgiveness-psychology-essay/>

present the precise definition of forgiveness and how to measure it remains an open discussion among psychologists.

Rye, Loiacono, Folck, Olszewski, Heim & Madia (2001) had compartmentalized forgiveness into two factors called the Absence of Negativity (AN) and the Presence of Positivity (PP). Absence of negativity is measured by negative opinions, affections and action tendencies (disparaging thinking, anger and desire to avoid or retaliate against the offender) one holds towards individual that wronged them. On the other hand, presence of positivity is the extent whereby individuals have love and compassion towards their offenders as well as carrying out favorable action tendencies toward them (Rye et al., 2001).

Despite years of research on this character strength psychologists are still unable to come to an agreement whether one or both factors are necessary in the measure of one's forgiveness. Some forgiveness scholars are convinced that absence of negative affect is largely sufficient to define the forgiveness process (Fincham, 2010); others insisted that it is not adequate as they trust experiencing positive affects toward one's transgressor is a critical point in completely forgiving someone (Edwards et al., 2002; Kearns & Fincham, 2005). Romig and Veenstra (1998) pointed out that individuals' ability to resolve developmental tasks from Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental stages requires both Absence of Negativity (AN) and the Presence of Positivity (PP) in their forgiveness (as cited in Scherbarth, 2007).

Worthington (2005) had another interesting explanation mentioning that individual's forgiveness towards strangers is just reducing negative

responses but eliminating unforgiveness will be replaced with the positive affects if offender is someone involving family members, colleagues and friends. He suggested that presence of positive affects is only applicable in situations where victim knows the transgressors (Worthington, 2005). In one way or another, measuring forgiveness through these two factors (AN & PP) has gained its popularity among psychologists researching this strength.

Gender differences in Gratitude and Forgiveness

Gender differences are an interesting part in the studies of affective traits including gratitude and forgiveness. Researchers back in the 1990's had begun this research with a broader aspect known as values orientation. Beutel and Marini (1995) advocate that women tend to show apparent gratitude towards interpersonal relationships while men are likely to value competition and materialism. Eisenberg & Fabes (1998) showed evidence in their write up titled Prosocial Development that women are more empathic than men, suggesting them to be more people oriented as compared to counterparts. Although both genders display gratitude in daily life, women are believed to be more expressive when it comes to emotions like gratefulness. This also influences them to report experiencing indebtedness more intensely and frequently (Simon & Nath, 2004; Gordon, Musher-Eizenman, Holub & Dalrymp, 2004; Naito, Wangwan & Tani, 2005).

A research conducted by Kashdan, Mishra, Breen & Froh (2009) had some interesting findings about this topic. They found that women evaluated gratitude to be more interesting and exciting as compared to men, whom reported greater burden and obligation with lesser gratitude upon receiving a gift or favor from others. Besides that, men also mentioned that positive

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affects will be lesser if their benefactors were of same gender. According to Adetunji & Adesida (2008), men may interpret expressions of gratitude as a sign of vulnerability and weakness, which is believed to threaten their masculinity and social reputation. Furthermore, women with higher gratitude are more likely to experience sovereign and fulfilling their belonging needs but men on the other hand may feel vice versa should they portray greater gratitude (Kashdan, Mishra, Breen & Froh, 2009).

Moving on to forgiveness, Miller, Worthington & Mcdaniel (2008) conducted a meta-analytical review on gender differences and forgiveness for 70 researches relating to this theme. The result obtained supported that females are more forgiving as compared to males. The highly possible explanation is that females are prone to be less vengeful as compared to males (Brown, 2004; McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick & Johnson, 2001). Men are commonly encouraged taking justice into their own hands but women are likely to be taught relationship harmony (Miller, Worthington & Mcdaniel, 2008). This practice is common among the Western population whom profoundly observe masculinity and feminine theory in their daily life.

However in contrary, Kmiec (2009) had different findings to offer. He found that there were no gender differences in terms of general forgiveness but men were more likely to forgive in recalling a specific incident. He justified when both genders are equal in overall forgiveness, men are less detailed in recalling a particular incident that lead to unforgiveness. Females on the other hand may recall thoughts which they had difficulty in forgiving the offender, even though this does not reflect their ordinary model of forgiving (Kmiec, 2009). Fehr, Gelfand & Nag (2010) also duplicated similar result <https://assignbuster.com/correlations-of-gratitude-and-forgiveness-psychology-essay/>

supporting that gender does not differ in terms of forgiveness after analyzing 76 studies containing 11730 participants ($r < .01$).

Correlations of Gratitude and Forgiveness

Gratitude and forgiveness in modern years had been scientifically proven to have associations that enhance better living among individuals and community at large. Sufficient researches had convinced scholars that both gratitude (Froh, Yurkewicz & Kashdan, 2009) and forgiveness (Lawler-Row & Piferi, 2006; Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2007) do correlates in predicting individual subjective well being. Both character strengths are further identified as the sources of interpersonal and intrapersonal strengths that foster a healthy physical and psychological environment.

Experimental data confirms that gratitude and forgiveness are positively correlated with optimistic, life satisfactions (Sastre, Vinsonneau, Neto, Girard & Mullet, 2003), physical health (Levenson, Aldwin & Yancura, 2006; Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini & Miller, 2007) and environmental mastery (Wood, Joseph & Linley, 2007; Hill & Allemand, 2010). In contrary, grateful and forgiving individuals are negatively correlated with pessimistic affect such as stress, anxiety and depression (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott & Wade, 2005; Eaton, Struthers, Santelli, 2006; Wood, Maltby, Gillet, Linley & Joseph, 2008; Tse & Yip, 2009; Gavian, 2011).

A recent research done by Froh, Fan, Emmons, Bono, Huebner & Watkins (2011) supported that individuals that regularly experience gratitude in life are more likely to enjoy better well being and longer life satisfaction because they are more capable in adjusting to their positive social environment. This

idea was built on previous research by McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson (2001) highlighting that gratitude emotion essentially serve as a (1) moral barometer, motivating individuals to be sensitive towards the help they receive daily, (2) moral reinforce function that inspire grateful individual to behave prosocially towards others and (3) moral reinforcer function which cultivates benefactors future moral behaviors.

Besides that, Allemand, Hill, Ghaemmaghami & Martin (2012) had also extended previous findings by using future time perspective as a moderating factor in examining adult's forgiveness and subjective well being. They found out that individuals whom believe of having limited future time portray stronger positive association between forgiveness and well being. However the moderating effect does not apply for negative affect and pessimism. The discrepancy obtained indicates that positive affect and negative affect (Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996) as well as optimism and pessimism (Herzberg et al., 2006) are not direct opposite characteristics as suggested in preceding studies.

Other than focusing solely on non clinical samples, years worth of experiments also manage to induce both psychologists and medical practitioners to consider that suitable gratitude (Ng & Wong, 2013; Joseph & Wood, 2010; Wood & Tarrrier, 2010; Chan, 2008) and forgiveness (Witvliet, Ludwing & Laan, 2001; Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Carson et. al., 2005; Friedman & Toussaint, 2006) interventions will be beneficial towards physically and psychologically ill clients. By adopting gratitude and forgiveness as strength based interventions in helping clinical settings'

clients to cope with their sicknesses had been verified to be as effective as existing problem focused interventions.

For instance Toussaint et. al. (2010) managed to establish that fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue patients showed signs of improvements after learning the art of forgiving during their treatment periods. This is because fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue symptoms are aggravated by patients' frustration, anger, stress and fear (Raymond & Brown, 2000). Forgiveness is found to be a coping mechanism that will alleviate the exacerbating role of negative emotional reactions hence offering a cure towards these sicknesses (Toussaint et. al., 2010). This favorable outcome was earlier acknowledged by Carson, Keefe, Lynch, Carson, Goli, Fras & Trop (2005) mentioning that focusing on positive affects in life instead of thinking about failures in treating illness may be beneficial towards chronic fatigue patients because the sickness is partially convoluted by anger, antipathy and stress as stated above.

An excellent supporting reason why gratitude and forgiveness are subjective well being booster and effective clinical interventions is because individuals with these character strengths are also equipped with positive emotional attributions such empathy, self compassion and acceptance (Breen, Kashdan, Lenser & Finchman, 2010). Several studies advocate gratitude (McCullough & Hoyt, 2002) and forgiveness (Brown, 2003; Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2005) to positively correlates with both cognitive (scenario attributions) and affective (feeling the victim's emotion) aspects of empathy. Grateful and forgiving individuals are prone to understand others better by

analyzing situations from other's point of views which circuitously improve their social supports and interpersonal relationship.

Besides empathy, self compassion also reflects an individual's warmth and perspective taking towards self and others. According to Werner, Jazaieri, Goldin, Ziv, Heimberg & Gross (2012), self compassion can be defined as the talent to hold a kind and non-judgmental perspective of oneself and be conscious of the similarities between self and others. According to Fehr, Gelfand & Nag (2010), self compassion within the context of forgiveness is seen to enhance victims' perceptiveness of why their offenders might have affronted them. This will indirectly reduce their urge for vengeance and anger hence improves the likelihood of forgiveness to occur. The ultimate outcome of these individuals would be healthier physical and better recovery from sickness due to the reduction in unnecessary stress and anger.

Lastly, acceptance which is known as individual's willingness in opening up to experiences, thoughts, feelings, physical sensations as well as life events also proved to show indirect relations with gratitude and forgiveness (Breen, Kashdan, Lenser & Finchman, 2010). Acceptance provides individuals a platform to respond accordingly to situational demands by fully experiencing every occurring event. By having high level of acceptance individual will be sensitive towards the good deed others had done for them that indirectly elevate their gratitude level. On the other hand, forgiveness and acceptance are related in the direction of embracing negative events while responding with objectivity and liveness. Both of these character strengths will then foster good resiliency for individuals to cope with difficult, unsuspected downturn in life.

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In short, gratitude and forgiveness may oblige discrete attributions (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002) but share a common conceptually linked as positively valence, portraying empathic characters that is associated with both psychological and physical health. It is strongly believed that literatures presented here are both promising and convincing for current research to focus in exploring the correlations between gratitude and forgiveness within same Asian sample group.

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