

Children's Concept of Forgiveness

Analiza R. Adarlo, Janine Mae V. Corpuz, and Joan C. Villanueva

Abstract—Testing the idea that the process of forgiveness is intrinsically different across diverse relationships, this study examined whether forgiveness can already be facilitated by children ages 4-6. Two different intervention sessions which consists of 40 children (half heard stories about unfair blame and half heard stories about a double standard (between subjects variable) was completed. Investigators performed experimental analyses to examine the role of forgiveness in social and familial context. Results indicated that forgiveness can already be facilitated by children. Children see scenarios on double standard to be more unfair than normal scenarios (Scenario 2 (double standard) ($M = 7.54$) Scenario 1 (unfair blame) ($M = 4.50$), Scenario 4 (double standard) ($M = 7.$) Scenario 3 (getting blamed for something the friend did) ($M = 6.80$) $p < .05$. The findings confirmed that children were generally willing to grant forgiveness to a mother even though she was unfair, but less so to a friend. Correlations between sex, age and forgiveness were analyzed. Significant relationships was found on scenarios presented and caring task scores ($r_{xy} = -.314$). Their tendency to forgive was related to dispositional and situational factors.

Keywords--- dispositional factors familial context forgiveness, situational, social context

I. INTRODUCTION

IN many typical relationships, people inevitably encounter conflict situations. Whether a simple incompatibility of goals, or more serious relational transgression individuals in conflict draw upon a variety of strategies to respond to interpersonal injuries. Researchers agree that two strategies used to cope with transgressions, avoidance and revenge, are typical responses to conflict in interpersonal relationships. Fortunately, people have a more positive and productive response for coping with interpersonal transgressions: forgiveness.

As defined by Wade and Worthington (2003), forgiveness means replacing the bitter, angry feelings of vengefulness which often result from a hurt, with positive feelings of goodwill toward the offender. Forgiveness is an increase in our internal motivation to repair and maintain a relationship. Children's understanding of different emotional concepts varies by age and developmental stage. One actually needs to go through a process of forgiving so that no resentment or anger will be held. Children are being taught by their parents about addressing apologies to someone they hurt or forgive someone who hurt them.

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Forgiveness may be a positive social response that would promote meaningful interpersonal relationship. However, at the same time, forgiveness is not an option for some children, particularly for those children who are consistently experiencing unfairness and or otherwise have been hurt by somebody. When we know more about displays of resentment as well as forgiveness in children we are able to give more effective helps to their pro social and emotional development.

To further investigate on the psychology of forgiveness, the researchers seek to examine whether forgiveness can already be facilitated during pre-school years. It aims to (a) determine children's general understanding of unfairness. It further seeks to (b) identify children's types of feelings of unfairness and strengths of these feelings. The researchers also want to (c) assess children's willingness to grant forgiveness as opposed to expressing resentment (c1). To compare the willingness to forgive between familial and social context (d) determine children's understanding about the concept of forgiveness, the researchers also (e) aim to identify the correlations between forgiveness, age and sex.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

A pure experimental design, which relies on controlled methods, random assignment and the manipulation of variables to test a hypothesis, was utilized by the researchers in determining whether forgiveness can already be facilitated by children under early childhood stage. It is composed of three experimental interventions given to children in Batangas City. The dominant methods used are set of short stories showing unfair acts. Data were gathered by means of rating scales given to children on the intervention process.

III. SUBJECTS OF THE STUDY

The participants in the study were children ages 4-6 who are currently attending local (primary) schools in Batangas City. The study consisted of 19 girls and 21 boys. The participants of the study consisted of children ages 4-6. There were a total of 40 subjects who participated in the study. 52.5% were male and 47.5 were female. Moreover, the study consisted of 40% children who were five years old, 35% were six years old and 25% were 4 years old. The researchers used random sampling technique for the intervention process.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experiment 1 *Children's judgments and degrees of fairness or unfairness*

Four types of scenario were designed. Two scenarios described situations where a child wronged and two depicted

situations in which the child will be subjected to a double standard. Each pair of stories described an interaction either between a child and a mother (Parent stories) or between a child and a friend (Friend stories). Children rated the degrees of fairness or unfairness by pointing to a 9 point scale designed by the researchers. The scale was composed of colorful face images which represents (7=extremely unfair, 1=not unfair at all).

TABLE I
CHILDREN'S GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF FAIRNESS AND UNFAIRNESS

Scenarios	Fairness Rating(f)	Unfairness Rating (f)
Scenario 1	6	4
Scenario 2	0	10
Scenario 3	8	2
Scenario 4	0	10

Scenario 1 (Parent-Child Story) Scenario 2(Parent- Child Story Double Standard) Scenario 3(Friend-Child Story) Scenario 4 (Friend-Child Story Double Standard)

A small number of children judged Scenario 1 and Scenario 3 as fair. (Scenario 1, 6 and Scenario 2, 8).The majority of children consistently thought that Double Standard situations described in the scenarios were unfair for the main character in the scenarios. (Scenario 2, 10 and Scenario 4, 10)

Experiment 2 Children's types of feelings of unfairness and strength of these feelings. This experiment was conducted to identify children's types of feelings of unfairness as well as strengths of these feelings. Children will report how the child in the scenario might be feeling after the experience of unfairness.

TABLE II
CHILDREN'S RATING OF UNFAIRNESS

Scenarios	Mean	Standard Deviation
Scenario 1 (N)	4.5	1.89
Scenario 2(DS)	7.54	2.1
Scenario 3(N)	6.8	2.9
Scenario 4(DS)	7.75	1.98

N- Normal Scenario DS-Double Standard

The Parent story and Friend story both had two themes (blamed when innocent, or subjected to a double standard). Differences between these two themes were analyzed by a *t*-test. Within the parent scenarios, children who listen to Scenario 2 (double standard) ($M = 7.5432, SD = 2.1000$) indicated significantly higher degree of unfairness than children who listened to Scenario 1 (unfair blame) ($M = 4.500, SD= 1.8966$), $p < .05$. In the friend scenarios, the children who listened to Scenario 4 (double standard) ($M = 7.7500, SD = 1.9850$) rated the degree of unfairness higher than the children who listened to Scenario 3 (getting blamed for something the friend did) ($M = 6.800, SD = 2.9000$), $p < .05$.

Experiment 3 *Children's willingness to grant forgiveness as opposed to expressing resentment.* Three imaginary situations were presented as a judgment task to assess willingness to share, care, and trust. These tasks measured forgiveness as opposed to hostility and resentment.

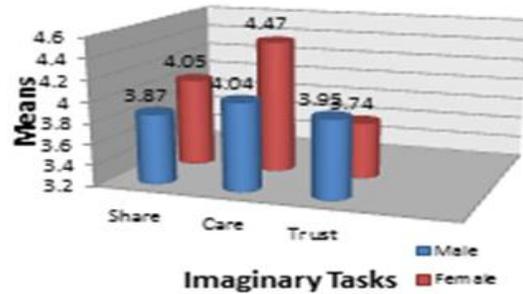


Fig. 1 Children's willingness to grant forgiveness as opposed to expressing resentment

Fig 1 shows the means of Imaginary Tasks Variables to assess hostility according to sex. Results illustrate that female respondents showed more sharing and caring attitudes towards a transgressor who asked forgiveness with means of 4.05 and 4.47, respectively. On the other hand, male respondents (mean = 3.95) scored higher in trusting task than the female respondents (mean=3.74).

TABLE III
CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TOWARDS SOMEONE WHO HURT HIM/HER

Theme	Categories
Consideration of learned values from a mother-figure	Children report events to their mother whenever someone hurt them (22)
Saying sorry	Children says sorry whenever someone hurt them (47)
Grudge-holding	Children hold hostile feelings to persons who hurt them
Consideration of learned values from a father-figure	Children report events to their father when someone offended them (37)
Vengeance	Children seek revenge to persons who offended them (22)

Table III shows the themes and categories under Children's response towards someone who hurt him/her. The theme that acquired majority of important statements is Consideration of learned values from a mother-figure which is categorized by the researcher under Children report events to their mother whenever someone hurt them. The second theme having the subsequent most significant statements is Saying sorry, which describe and categorized under Children says sorry whenever someone hurt them. The theme that has acquired the third most responses from respondents is the Grudge-holding, categorized under Children hold hostile feelings to persons who hurt them.

TABLE IV
CHILDREN'S WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE BETWEEN FAMILIAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Theme	Categories
Attachment	Children are more willing to forgive their mothers because of attachment style. (30)
Offender apology	Children forgive their friends and colleagues when asked for apology. (25)
Empathy	Children forgive transgressors (mother and friend) because of perceived empathy. (16)

For the main theme, *Attachment*, most of the children are more willing to forgive their mothers because they feel more attached to them than to their friends. For the theme *Offender apology*, children forgive friends who showed sincerity in

apologizing. For the last theme, *Empathy*, children are willing to forgive because they empathize with the transgressors. In assessing children’s willingness to forgive between familial and social context, the attachment to the aggressor turned out to be the major factor. Children are more willing to forgive a parent than a friend because of the closeness in their relationship. Also, a child forgives a friend once he/she apologizes and commit fault. Researchers discerned that children understood the scenarios as representation of share, care and trust tasks. Children were able to internalized and present their judgment on scenarios.

TABLE V
CHILDREN’S UNDERSTANDING OF FORGIVENESS

Children answered an open-ended question, “What does forgiveness mean to you?” at the end of their scenario-based interview session and the three assessment tasks.

Theme	Categories
Accepting Apology	Children understand forgiveness as being good and accepting apologies (52)
Positive peer-relationship	Children sees forgiveness as road in building positive peer-relationship (22)
Religious orientation	Children deem forgiveness as God’s of teaching. (69)
Saying sorry	Children believed that forgiveness means saying sorry. (163)
Regaining Friendship	Children understand forgiveness as a way to regain friendship (91)

The table illustrates Children’s understanding of forgiveness. The first theme is Accepting Apology. Under this category, children understand forgiveness as being good and accepting apologies. Most children consider forgiveness as corresponding to being “good/kind” and receiving apologies. Others see forgiveness as part of maintaining a healthy relationship with their parents/friends. Forgiveness is also seen as rooted to the religiosity of the children, considering it as part of God’s teaching. The minority of the respondents defined forgiveness as a relation to expressing gratitude to the other person involved.

V. CONCLUSION

Children perceived unfairness as judgment when they do not received just treatments, experienced hurt and negative feelings. They reported feelings of sad, angry, and happy when they experienced unfair treatment. Overall, intensities of these three negative feelings were stronger in the friend story than in the parent story. Children’s’ were willing to grant forgiveness as opposed to expressing resentment. Results illustrate that female respondents showed more sharing and caring attitudes towards a transgressor who asked forgiveness while male respondents were more trustful to the transgressor who asked for forgiveness than females. Furthermore, younger children have difficulty in articulating their concept of forgiveness. They, conversely, regard forgiveness as done by good children, as God’s teaching, as a factor in building and regaining friendships and social interaction, and as a sign of gratitude to significant others.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Consent

School Administrator
Batangas City

Dear Sir / Madame
Good day!

We are BS Psychology students of Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas.

We humbly request your permission that we may be able to conduct experiment with your students for our thesis in Psychology entitled: “Children’s’ Concept of Forgiveness “. Series of experiment involving storytelling and interview will be done. Your permission will help us go through the process of thesis writing as much as help us accomplish our goal, that is, to gain knowledge regarding forgiveness among children. Rest assured that the students’ identities will not be revealed and we will abide with the rules and regulations with regards to the activity that we will conduct.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Analiza Adarlo Janine Mae Corpuz Joan Villanueva
Researchers

Dr. Lida Landicho
Research Adviser

APPENDIX B

Student Informed Consent Statement

The Psychology students at Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas support the practice or protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw anytime without penalty.

You will be participating the session by answering questions provided by the researchers. During the interview, the researchers will use a voice recorder to record the interview. We rest assured that the information will be confidential between the participant and the researchers. It is estimated that the activities will take no more than 30 minutes of your time.

Your participation is solicited although strictly voluntary. We assure you that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings.

Sincerely,

Analiza Adarlo Janine Mae Corpuz Joan Villanueva
Researchers

Dr. Lida Landicho
Research Adviser

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide Questions (One-on-one interview with a child) Tell about the most significant hurt you have experienced in your life.

1. What happened?
2. When did this happen?
3. Who was involved?
4. What were your reactions immediately after the hurt?
5. What reactions do you still have as you think and write about the hurt now?
6. What is your understanding about forgiveness?

APPENDIX D

Friend Story – Female

While playing in the sandbox, Molly built a castle tall. She built it very carefully, and hoped it would not fall. It took her a long time, but in the end it looked just great. It even had a bridge that led right up to the front gate. But when she finished building her imaginary town, a big bully named Maggie came and smashed the whole thing down. She stomped and kicked the sand until there was no castle there, and Molly in a tearful voice said, "That just isn't fair. "Then Maggie said, "Too bad for you. Life isn't fair you see, and if life isn't fair, then why do you think I should be?" It hurt to hear what Maggie said. She really didn't care.

Friend Story – Male

John and Rick are best of friends. They are always together and they share the same interests, like playing basketball and riding the bicycle. One day, John invited Rick to play basketball. John was so happy showing his brand new basketball. They had fun playing and went home later that afternoon. The next day, John and Heidi, their other friend, went to school together. "John, where is Rick? Why aren't you together?" asked Heidi. A little annoyed, John told her that his new ball is missing, "I guess, Rick took it. He's the only one I have shown the ball. "Rick learned that John was accusing him of taking the basketball. Rick explained to Heidi that he is innocent, that he didn't take the ball.

Parent Story – Female

For Lisa, summer is the best part of the year because she can play until there is no one else to play with. But that day was different. She doesn't feel like playing at all. So she decided to stay in her room and read. Late that afternoon, she heard her mom calling her urgently, "Lisa, Lisa! Where are you?" "Mom, why? I'm over here. I thought you'll be out till dinner time?" Lisa asked. "Where did you hide my money?" her mom asked furiously.

"But mom, I don't have your money." I know it's wrong to get someone else's things. I will never do that. "So you say, but you're the only one here who is capable of doing it. You're here all day.

Parent Story - Male

One day, Paul and his father went to their farm to visit his grandmother. Whereas, his Uncle Ben went to their house and left a letter to his older brother who stayed home. The letter was addressed to their mother. The next day, their mother was

looking for the letter and asked Paul, "Where is the letter left by your Uncle Ben?" "I have no idea. I was in the farm with Father the whole day yesterday," Paul said. "But your brother said you received the letter", angrily, his mother said.

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Janine Mae Corpuz is a graduate of BS Psychology at Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas. She is the present HR Admin Officer of Batangas Regional Hospital. JM loves to read books in connection with her field of interest such as Theories of Personality, Abnormal Psychology and Physiological Psychology. Moreso, she prefers to work in line with Clinical and Forensic Psychology. She has plans of pursuing her medical studies.

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