Forgiveness and the appraisal-coping process in response to relationship conflicts: Implications for depressive symptoms

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Abstract: The present investigation assessed the mediating role of appraisal-coping processes in the relation between forgiveness and depressive symptoms associated with intimate relationship conflicts. Study 1 assessed the role of forgiveness in the context of a severe relationship stressor, namely women experiencing dating abuse, along with the appraisal-coping responses and depressive symptoms associated with such a stressor. Study 2 evaluated the function served by forgiveness among men and women in response to non-abusive relationship stressors, including the dissolution of the relationship, and also assessed the relations among forgiveness, appraisal-coping processes, and depressive symptoms. Women who encountered dating abuse were less likely to forgive their partners, and this was linked to higher levels of depressive symptoms. The relation between forgiveness and lower depressive symptoms was partially mediated by lower threat appraisals, secondary appraisals of the effectiveness of emotion-focused coping, and the reduced endorsements of this coping strategy (Study 1). Appraisal-coping processes similarly mediated the relation between forgiveness and depressive symptoms among men and women reporting conflict in an ongoing (non-abusive) relationship or a relationship break-up (Study 2). It is suggested that the relation between forgiveness and diminished distress operates primarily by guiding individuals' appraisals of the conflict and by diminishing the reliance on emotion-focused coping. © Informa Healthcare USA, Inc.

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