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Forgiveness of Others and Self-Forgiveness: The Predictive Role of Cognitive Distortions, Empathy, and Rumination*

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A R T I C L E I N F O	A B S T R A C T
	Purpose: People encounter many hurtful experiences in daily life. Hurtful experiences lead to negative emotions such as anger, revenge, shame, and guilt, and people need to overcome these experiences effectively in order to protect their mental health. Unforgiveness proves to be one of the most important sources of stress in an individual's life, and forgiveness, on the other hand, is acknowledged as an effective coping mechanism that can be utilised in coping with this stressful mood. The purpose of this study was to investigate the predictive role of interpersonal cognitive distortions, empathy, and rumination on levels of self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. ***Research Methods:*** The study was carried out with 527 university students. The Heartland Forgiveness Scale, Interpersonal Reactivity Index, short form of Rumination Scale, Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale, and Personal Information Form were used in order to collect data for the study. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was used to analyze the data. ***Findings:*** The results showed

that where forgiveness of others was taken as a dependent variable in the regression model, cognitive distortions for interpersonal rejection, perspective taking, and empathic concern were significant predictors of forgiveness of others. Furthermore, in the model where self-forgiveness was chosen as a dependent variable, rumination and personal distress were found to be significant predictors of self-forgiveness. ***Implications for Research and Practice:*** Based on the results, during the forgiveness-based counseling interventions or psychoeducational programs, it can be more effective that practitioners consider related features or create modules based on these psychological constructs.

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Introduction

Influenced by positive psychology, there has been a recent increase in studies on how to utilize positive resources such as positive emotions or character strengths of individuals during the counseling processes (Rashid, 2015; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Forgiveness is a significant psychological structure which has been studied for about the last thirty years (Enright et al., 1991; Thompson et al., 2005; Worthington, 2013). According to Worthington and Scherer (2004), unforgiveness proves to be one of the most important sources of stress in an individual's life. *Forgiveness*, on the other hand, is acknowledged as an effective coping mechanism that can be utilized in coping with the stress caused by unforgiveness (Berry et al., 2005; Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

It is remarkable that researchers attempting to define forgiveness of others have not yet reached a full consensus on whether forgiveness was a moral gift presented to the offender (Enright et al., 1991), a cognitive decision (DiBlasio, 2000), or an internal motivational transformation happening in the offended individual (McCullough et al., 1998). Although there are some differences, forgiveness of others has been regarded as cognitive, affective, motivational, behavioral, intraindividual, interpersonal, prosocial changes in attitude from negative to positive toward a perceived transgression (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 2005).

Psychology researchers started to explore forgiveness, especially after the 1990s, as a multidimensional structure. According to scholars (Hepp-Daxx, 1996; Thompson et al., 2005), one of the most significant dimensions of forgiveness is self-forgiveness. During the process of self-forgiveness, an individual thinks that he or she violated some important personal, social, and/or moral standard because of an offense he or she did. These thoughts bring about feelings of guilt and shame (Tangney, Boone & Dearing, 2005) and therefore give way to self-resentment, self-criticism, and even self-humiliation (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Holmgren, 1998). Individuals, however, let these negative emotions end by choosing self-forgiveness consciously and go through an important transformation by acting upon a more benevolent motive towards themselves (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

There are many studies in the literature that have demonstrated that forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness are indeed positively supportive of the physical and psychological health of individuals. Study findings show that as people's levels of forgiveness of others increase, their anger (Waltman et al., 2009), depression (Friedberg, Suchday & Sirinivas, 2009), and stress (Suchday, Freidberg & Almeida, 2006) levels decrease and their physical (Lawler-Row et al., 2008) and psychological health conditions (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2007) improve. Similarly, it was found that when an individual was able to have self-forgiveness following an offense, it gave way to a decrease in depressive symptoms (Maltby, Macaskill & Day, 2001) and feelings of shame (Rangganadhan & Todorov, 2010) while it helped improve that person's life satisfaction (Thompson et al., 2005).

Studies on forgiveness have begun to find a place in the field of counseling since the mid-2000s in Turkey, and these studies have focused more on forgiveness of others. The results of these studies have revealed that forgiveness had statistically significant relationships with marital adjustment, attributions (Taysi, 2007), jealousy, empathy, self-esteem (Alpay, 2009), attachment styles (Yildirim, 2009), religiosity (Ayten, 2009), mental health (Akin, Ozdevecioglu & Unlu, 2012), meaning in life, subjective well-being (Yalcin & Malkoc, 2015), and self actualization (Sari, 2014).

Empathy and Forgiveness

Almost all of the models defining forgiveness of others stated that having a high level of empathy makes forgiveness easier, while a lower level makes it harder (Macaskill, Maltby & Day, 2002). For instance, the model of social-cognitive determinants of forgiveness stresses that empathy is one of the most significant socio-cognitive determinants affecting forgiveness in interpersonal relationships (McCullough et al. 1998). Similarly, within the framework of the process model of forgiveness (Enright et al., 1996; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) and also the pyramid model of Worthington (1998), the necessity to have empathy by an offender is underlined. The relationships between sub-dimensions of empathy and forgiveness of others have been demonstrated by a great number of correlational studies (Mellor, Fung & Mamat, 2012). For example, the results of a study by Konstam, Chernoff, and Deveney (2001) indicated that forgiveness was positively related to perspective taking and empathic concern sub-scales of empathy among college students. Similarly, Alpay (2009) stated that empathy was a positive significant predictor of forgiveness of others among married individuals in Turkey.

In spite of that, various arguments have been put forward in the literature about the relationship between self-forgiveness and empathy (Enright et al., 1996; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Tagney, Boone & Dearing, 2005). There is only a limited number of studies exploring the relationship between empathy and self-forgiveness in related literature and the findings of these studies are inconsistent. The results of a study by Turnage et al. (2012) conducted with 86 college students have revealed that there is no significant relationship between self-forgiveness and empathy. However, the findings of another study (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007), which handled empathy from a multidimensional perspective, demonstrated that the other sub-scales of empathy showed no relationship, whereas individuals with lower personal distress levels had a higher tendency to forgive themselves.

Especially in Western culture, empathy has been used as a core tool of forgiving the offender in the counseling process. On the other hand, cultural differences have been highlighted by numerous studies (Mellor, Fung & Mamat, 2012). Therefore, more studies are needed to reach clarity about the role of empathy for forgiveness interventions in collectivist cultures. In particular, while practitioners are helping to make the self-forgiveness process of clients easier (Worthington, 2013), there is no distinct consensus in the related literature about whether sub-dimensions of empathy contribute this or not.

Rumination and Forgiveness

Since an individual's constant engagement with images, thoughts, and feelings related to hurtful experiences lead to the continuation of anger and revenge and the inability to forgive the other affectively (Berry et al., 2005; Worthington, 2006), counselors who conduct interventions based on forgiveness attach especial importance to reducing the cycle of ruminative thinking (Goldman & Wade, 2012; Louden-Gerber, 2008). Further, there are studies in the related literature demonstrating the relationships between forgiveness of others and rumination. For instance, the results of a study by Berry et al. (2005) revealed a negative relationship between forgiveness of others and rumination. Similar to the results of that study, Suchday, Friedberg, and Almeida (2006) found that the increased levels of rumination by college students was a significant predictor of low scores for forgiveness of others.

Rumination, according to Ingersoll-Dayton and Krause (2005), is a process that can not only make it harder for an individual to forgive others, but also can prevent self-forgiveness. Rumination is considered to be an effective factor in the continuation of negative feelings and thoughts towards one's self regarding a transgression that he or she has done (Luskin, 2002). Similar to the arguments already presented, the study by Barber, Maltby, and Macaskill (2005) showed that individuals' engagement with ruminative thoughts about anger and related memories made it harder for individuals to forgive themselves. Similarly, in a study by Bugay (2010) conducted with college students in Turkey, there was a negative relationship between rumination and self-forgiveness.

Although many studies in the related literature have revealed relationships between forgiveness and rumination, practitioners need clearer findings in order to decide whether they should tackle rumination as a personality trait or not in the counseling process. While some of the studies (Karremans & Smith, 2010; McCullough, Bono & Root, 2007) note the importance of the relationship between forgiveness and state rumination, there are, on the other hand, some findings (Ysseldyk, Matheson & Anisman, 2007) that reveal connections within the contexts of trait rumination.

Cognitive Distortions and Forgiveness

Studies in the literature frequently stress that individuals not only go through affective, behavioral, and motivational transformations, but they also experience cognitive transformations during the process of forgiveness (DiBlasio, 2000; Enright, Freedman & Rique, 1998; McCullough et al., 1998). In forgiveness-based individual and group counseling interventions, the healing process begins with a conscious cognitive decision to forgive (Davis et al., 2015; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Most researchers and practitioners emphasize that cognitive transformation has to be experienced by offended people at an early period of the forgiveness process in order to replace negative emotions with positive or neutral ones (Cioni, 2007; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). The essential thing for reaching emotional forgiveness is to

reframe injured people's perceptions and thoughts about their hurtful experience, injurer, or themselves (Cioni, 2007; Thompson et al., 2005).

Miceli and Castelfranchi (2011), who explored forgiveness within a cognitive and motivational context, underlined that an individual needs to reconstruct or reframe his or her cognitive schemas about agonizing hurtful experiences in order to forgive. Similarly, according to Gordon, Baucom, and Synder (2000), who have studied forgiveness from a cognitive approach, people need to explore the core beliefs and cognitive distortions of themselves to comprehend forgiveness. As people have some fundamental assumptions about how their worlds and interpersonal relationships should be, they expect both themselves and others to act in accordance with their principles. These assumptions of individuals, however, may be violated in experiences where being hurt and hurting of others took place (Thompson et al., 2005). Thus, this situation can drag them into a cognitive and psychological complex.

Further, some recent studies (Bono & McCullough, 2006; Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2000; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2011) have handled forgiveness within the context of cognitive processes. For instance, as a matter of fact, some specialists offering psychological services, such as Menahem and Love (2013), regard forgiveness as an important tool that can be utilized in cognitive therapy in certain problematic situations by drawing attention to the relationships between cognitive therapy and the process of forgiveness. Besides, in some of the psychoeducational programs organized for developing forgiveness skills (Bugay & Demir, 2012; Goldman, 2010; Navidian & Bahari, 2013), extra time is also allocated to sessions for participants in order to make participants aware of their automatic thoughts or cognitive distortions.

According to Beck (1995), people develop some core beliefs or assumptions, which are generally never questioned and regarded to be unchangeable, about other people and the world that they live in. Safran and Segal (2004), who emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships in cognitive therapy, extended the content of core beliefs. According to Safran and Segal (2004), people develop *interpersonal schemas*, which are cognitive representations of interpersonal experiences, by observing their experiences, especially with people who happen to be their first attachment figures dating from early ages. Based on these findings, Hamamci and Buyukozturk (2003) have stated that people might also have distortions that they can generalize to all their interpersonal relationships. These authors (2003) have also underlined that in the collectivist Turkish society, people might have three types of cognitive distortions related to their relationships. These include interpersonal rejections (avoidance of closeness), unrealistic relationship expectations, and interpersonal misperceptions. Interpersonal rejections represent distorted views of individuals where it is believed that becoming close to others would bring about negative consequences and that therefore they should not form intimate relationships with others. Unrealistic relationship expectations refer to high expectations and standards, especially the behaviors of others in their relationships. Cognitive distortions about interpersonal misperceptions signify unrealistic presumptions of another's feelings and thoughts in interpersonal relationships.

Forgiveness has both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions (McCullough, Pargament & Thoresen, 2000). While people are forgiving, they experience inner changes. But at the same time this process occurs in an interpersonal context (Worthington, 2005). In this case, dysfunctional and overly generalized beliefs of individuals about the nature of interpersonal relationships—like "being too intimate with people generally causes problems" and "people do not keep their promises"— can prevent them from making a strong decision to forgive. The first and cognitive step toward forgiveness might be challenged by cognitive distortions about the interpersonal relationships of the injured. Thus, reaching emotional forgiveness can be harder because contrary to what is believed, one of the primary resources of unforgiveness might be these distortional beliefs rather than lack of empathy or intense ruminative thoughts. In order to utilize forgiveness as an effective tool in counseling interventions, practitioners might primarily determine these possible beliefs and reevaluate and reframe them with their clients. Although one frequently comes across traces of the cognitive model in proposed models on the forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness, there are quite a few studies that explore whether or not forgiveness is related to the fundamental concepts of the cognitive model. Therefore, this study aims at investigating whether forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness can be predicted at a statistically significant level by empathy, rumination, and cognitive distortions about interpersonal relationships. Based on this aim, the main research questions of the present study were determined as follows:

    a.   Do empathy, rumination, and cognitive distortions about interpersonal relationships significantly predict forgiveness of others?

    b.   Do empathy, rumination, and cognitive distortions about interpersonal relationships significantly predict self-forgiveness?

Method

Research Design

A descriptive model based on correlational design was used in this study. The dependent variables of this study were forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness, and the predictor variables of the study were sub-dimensions of interpersonal cognitive distortions and sub-dimensions of empathy and rumination.

Research Sample

The study covered a total of 527 (271 females, 256 males) undergraduate students enrolled in various universities in Turkey. The ages of the students ranged between 18 and 33, and their mean age was $\overline{X}$ = 21.44 (SD= 2.05). One hundred and sixty three (30.9%) of the participants attended Ankara University, 189 (35.9%) attended Dicle University, and 175 (33.2%) attended Middle East Technical University. When the distribution of the participants according to which class they were in was studied, it was seen that 36 (6.8%) were in the preparatory class, 140 (26.6%) were

freshmen, 134 (25.4%) were sophomores, 106 (20.1%) were juniors, and 111 (21.1%) were seniors.

Research Instruments and Procedures

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS). This scale, which is composed of 18 items with a 7-point Likert-type scale, was developed by Thompson et al. (2005) in order to measure individuals' levels of forgiveness. The scale has three sub-scales called self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations, and each sub-scale has six items. The psychometric features of the scale point out that the Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficients were .86 for the total score and .75, .78, and .79 for the sub-scales respectively. The scale's adaptation study for Turkey was done by Bugay and Demir (2010). It was found that the Cronbach's α coefficients measured for the reliability of the scale in its Turkish form were found to be .81 for the total score, while they were .64, .79, and .76 for the sub-scales respectively. The scale's Cronbach's α coefficients for this study were measured as .72 for the total score, .71 for the forgiveness of others sub-scale, and .61 for the self-forgiveness sub-scale.

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The form was developed by Davis (1980) in order to assess both the cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy together. The scale has 28 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The IRI has four sub-scales referred to as "perspective taking," "empathic concern," "personal distress," and "fantasy." The Cronbach's α coefficients of the scale were measured separately for each gender and it was seen that the coefficients varied between .71 and .77 for its sub-scales. The IRI was adapted to Turkish by Engeler and Yargic (2007). The Cronbach's α coefficients of sub-scales were calculated within the framework of reliability studies. Coefficient values were found to be .73 for the perspective taking sub-scale, .66 for the empathic concern sub-scale, .76 for the fantasy sub-scale, and .60 for the personal distress sub-scale. In this study, Cronbach's α coefficients of IRI were calculated to be .79 for the total score and .64, .71, and .65 for the sub-scales respectively.

Short form of Ruminative Responses Scale (SRRS). This scale was devised by Treynor et al. (2003) by removing 12 items that resembled the items related to depressive symptoms found in the longer form of the Ruminative Response Scale. The RRS is composed of ten items on a 4-point Likert scale. It has two sub-scales referred to as "brooding" and "reflection," and each sub-scale is composed of five items. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Erdur-Baker and Bugay (2012). Reliability analysis results of the scale revealed that the Cronbach's α coefficient was .85 for the whole scale, .77 for the reflection sub-scale, and .75 for the brooding sub-scale. The Cronbach's α coefficient of the SRRS for this study was calculated to be .83 for the total score.

The Interpersonal Cognitive Distortions Scale. This scale was developed by Hamamci and Buyukozturk (2003). The 19-item scale uses a 5-point Likert scale. The results of the Principal Components Analysis revealed that the ICDS has a three-factor structure referred to as "interpersonal rejection," "unrealistic relationship expectation," and "interpersonal misperception." The sub-scales of interpersonal rejection and unrealistic relationship expectation are composed of eight items, whereas the sub-scale of interpersonal misperception has three items. The reliability

analyses of the scale showed that the Cronbach's α coefficients were .67 for the whole scale and .73, .66, and .49 for the interpersonal rejection, unrealistic relationship expectation, and interpersonal misperception sub-scales respectively. In this study, Cronbach's α coefficients of the ICDS were calculated to be .75 for the total score and .71, .76, and .67 for the sub-scales respectively.

Data Analysis

Before performing the analyses, data were prepared and whether the assumptions of the multiple regression analysis were met or not was investigated. All univariate and multivariate outliers within the variables were deleted from the data set. The tolerance values, variance inflated factors, and condition indices were calculated separately for each regression model in order to evaluate whether there was a multicollinearity problem between predictor variables, and it was seen that the tolerance values were higher than .81, the variance inflation factor was lower than 1.23, and the highest value for condition indices was 15.19. The Durbin-Watson coefficient was found to be 1.87 for the model with self-forgiveness as the dependent variable, whereas it was 2.02 for the model with forgiveness of others as the dependent variable. Then, two separate stepwise regression analysis were conducted to find out the predictive values of empathy, rumination, and cognitive distortions on the forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The Pearson correlation coefficients among the variables covered by the study and also the means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Means, Standard Deviations and Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Study Variables

Variables	$\overline{X}$	Sd	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Forgiveness of Others	24.85	6.76	-									
2. Self Forgiveness	27.58	5.06	.09*	-								
3. Interpersonal Rejections	19.69	5.19	-.20**	-.09*	-							
4. Unrealistic Relationship Expect.	23.39	5.65	-.02	-.13**	021***	-						
5. Interpersonal Misperception	9.77	2.49	-.04	-.02	.25**	.25***	-					
6. Rumination	23.08	5.37	-.05	-.22***	.25***	.25***	.12**	-				
7. Perspective Taking	17.67	4.44	.19**	.03	-.15***	.04	.15***	.06	-			
8. Empathic Concern	19.60	4.70	.17**	-.09*	-.06	.12**	.10*	.19***	.41***	-		
9. Fantasy	16.77	5.29	.03	-.03	-.02	.08*	.12**	.10*	.15***	.28***	-	
10. Personal Distress	13.32	4.79	.03	-.23***	.14***	.22***	-.01	.26***	.05	.33***	.20***	-

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, *p < .05

Regression Analysis Results of the Predictions for the Scores of Forgiveness of Others

Table 2 shows the stepwise multiple regression analysis results that were obtained in order to determine the prediction levels of interpersonal cognitive distortions, empathy, and rumination on forgiveness of others.

Table 2.

Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Forgiveness of Others

Model	Predictor	B	SE$_B$	β	t	R	R²	ΔR²	F
1	Constant	29.99	1.13		26.36***				
	Interp. Rejection	-.255	.056	-.196	-4.59***	.196	.039	.039	21.047***
2	Constant	24.80	1.73		14.38***				
	Interp. Rejection	-.224	.056	-.172	-4.02***				
	Perspective Tak.	-.252	.065	.165	3.86***	.255	.065	.027	18.269***
3	Constant	22.98	1.89		12.17***				
	Interp. Rejection	-.224	.055	-.172	-4.04***				
	Perspective Tak.	.184	.071	.121	2.59**				
	Empathic Con.	.154	.066	.107	2.32*	.273	.075	.010	14.077***

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Since unrealistic relationship expectation (p= .65), interpersonal misperception (p=.75), rumination (p= .51), fantasy (p= .57), and personal distress (p= .18) did not significantly predict forgiveness of others (p> .05), these variables were not included in the stepwise regression analysis. As shown in Table 2, only interpersonal rejection, perspective taking, and empathic concern significantly predicted the forgiveness of others.

The analysis was completed in three steps. *Interpersonal rejection*, which is one of the sub-scales of interpersonal cognitive distortions, was included in the first step of the analysis. It was seen that interpersonal rejection significantly predicted forgiveness of others (p= .000), and it explained about 4% of the variance in forgiveness of others on its own (R= .196, R² = .039, F$_{(1, 525)}$ = 21.047).

Perspective taking, which is one of the sub-scales of empathy, was analyzed within the scope of the second step. Perspective taking explained about 7% of the total variance in forgiveness of others together with interpersonal rejection (R= .255, R² = .065, F$_{(2, 524)}$ = 18.269, p = .000). The change in the squares of regression coefficients (ΔR²) demonstrated that the perspective taking variable made a 2.7% contribution to the total variance (F$_{(1, 524)}$ = 14.933, p = .000).

Empathic concern was added to the third and final step of stepwise regression analysis. According to the analysis results, interpersonal rejection, perspective taking, and empathic concern were statistically significant predictors of forgiveness of others, and these three variables together explained about 8% of the total variance in forgiveness of others (R= .273, R^2 = .075, $F_{(3, 523)}$ = 14.077, p = .000). It was seen that empathic concern made a 1% contribution to the total variance (ΔR^2= .010, $F_{(1, 523)}$ = 5.387, p < .05). The ranking of predictor variables in order of relative significance on forgiveness of others is as follows: interpersonal rejection (β= -.172), perspective taking (β= .121), and empathic concern (β= .107).

Regression Analysis Results of the Predictions for the Scores of Self-Forgiveness

Table 3 demonstrates the stepwise multiple regression analysis results that were obtained in order to determine the prediction levels of interpersonal cognitive distortions, empathy, and rumination on self-forgiveness.

Table 3.

Results of Stepwise Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-forgiveness

Model	Predictor	B	SE_B	β	t	R	R^2	ΔR^2	F
1	Constant	30.744	.636		48.31***				
	Personal Dist.	-.238	.045	-.225	-5.29***	.225	.051	.051	27.965***
2	Constant	33.932	1.01		33.71***				
	Personal Dist.	-.190	.046	-.180	-4.15***				
	Rumination	-.165	.041	-.176	-4.05***	.282	.079	.029	22.589***

*** p < .001

Since interpersonal rejection (p= .17), unrealistic relationship expectation (p= .06), interpersonal misperception (p= .62), perspective taking (p= .29), empathic concern (p= .71), and fantasy (p= .37) did not significantly predict self-forgiveness, these variables were not included in the stepwise regression analysis (p> .05). As is shown in Table 3, only personal distress and rumination were processed within the stepwise regression analysis.

The regression analysis was completed in two steps. *Personal distress*, which is one of the sub-scales of empathy, was analyzed in the first step. It was seen that personal distress was a significant predictor of self-forgiveness and explained about 5% of the variance in self-forgiveness on its own (R= .225, R^2 = .051, $F_{(1, 525)}$ = 27.965).

Rumination was added to the process in the second and final step. According to the analysis results, personal distress and rumination were significant predictors of self-forgiveness. These two variables together explained about 8% of the total variance in self-forgiveness (R= .282, R^2 = .079, $F_{(2, 524)}$ = 22.589, p = .000). It was also seen that rumination contributed to the total variance at 3% (ΔR^2 = .029, $F_{(1, 524)}$ =

16.393, p = .000). The relative significance ranking of the predictor variables on self-forgiveness was found to be personal distress (β= -.180) followed by rumination (β= -.176).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigates the predictive role of interpersonal cognitive distortions, empathy, and rumination on forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness. The findings are discussed according to the dependent variables used in the study.

Discussion of Findings Related to the Prediction of Forgiveness of Others

The findings of the study revealed that forgiveness of others was negatively predicted by cognitive distortions related to interpersonal rejection in order of significance, whereas it was positively predicted by empathy's sub-scales, perspective taking, and empathic concern.

Although traces of the cognitive model are frequently seen in the proposed models in the process of forgiveness (Gordon, Baucom & Snyder, 2000; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2011), limited studies were found that investigated the relationship between individuals' possible cognitive distortions as related to their interpersonal relations and forgiveness of others. It is, however, seen that the arguments put forward in the social-cognitive model on forgiveness of others support this finding of the study. This model emphasizes that an individual's having an affective and physical avoidance motive towards an injurer is one of the most significant signs that the other could not be forgiven (McCullough et al., 1998). Also, this finding confirms theoretical explanations of some of the proposed models (Gordon, Baucom & Synder, 2000) and intervention studies of forgiveness (Bugay & Demir, 2012; Goldman, 2010; Navidian & Bahari, 2013). Individuals with cognitive distortions related to interpersonal rejection have a core belief that forming intimate relationships with others would bring about negative consequences for themselves (Hamamci & Buyukozturk, 2003). When this situation is taken into consideration, one can state that the distorted beliefs of these people will be activated in a much more rapid and automatic manner against any hurtful experience. These disfunctional beliefs will be confirmed by new injuring situations. In these circumstances, empathizing with the offender or reducing rumination will be more difficult unless the disfunctional expectations have been reframed. Therefore, consistent with the finding of this study that interpersonal rejection is a stronger predictor than empathy and rumination, dwelling primarily on cognitive distortions in the counseling process may be more effective for forgiving the offender.

The results of the study revealed that perspective taking and empathic concern are significant predictors of forgiveness of others. When the existing studies exploring empathy and forgiveness of others are investigated together, it is seen that they were generally conducted with a differentiation set between cognitive and affective empathy. The results of other studies on the same subject are compatible with this study's finding that perspective taking positively predicted forgiveness

(Brown, 2003; Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). An individual focusing on the harmful consequences of a situation of injury for him- or herself will constantly feed his or her negative feelings, like anger, towards the other person. Thus, the cycle of inability to forgive will maintain its function in the individual's life. However, one needs to change the context in which the situation was evaluated (Enright et al., 1996; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) and to re-interpret his or her perceptions related to the hurtful experience or the injurer in order to be able to forgive the injurer (Thompson et al., 2005).

The results of this study also signify that empathic concern, which was defined as a type of other-oriented affective empathy, was a positive significant predictor of forgiveness of others. There are existing studies that support this finding (Burnette et al., 2009; Konstam, Holmes & Levine, 2003; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Related studies have found that participants' levels of forgiveness of others increased as their affective empathy or empathic concern levels increased. As was stated by Malcolm, Warwar, and Greenberg (2005), although perspective taking is necessary to understand the injurer and to re-evaluate the hurtful experience that the individual is in within a wider context, it does not bring about friendly or generous feelings for the person forgiven. For the person to have a transformation in his or her negative feelings for the injurer, he or she needs to have affective empathy with the other as well.

The results of the study also revealed that rumination did not make a significant contribution to the prediction of forgiving others. A large portion of the studies on forgiveness of others presented in the literature concluded that individuals had a harder time forgiving injurers as their rumination levels increased (Berry et al., 2005; Burnette et al., 2007; Karremens & Smith, 2010). In this situation, the finding of this study stating that rumination did not significantly predict forgiveness of others is thought-provoking. However, many psychological constructs such as anger, anxiety, forgiveness, and rumination have two separate dimensions called *state* and *trait*. Individuals' levels of anger, forgiveness, or rumination towards a specific situation may not always be parallel to their general levels of these traits. Therefore, it is possible to have a psychological construct being related to the state dimension of another variable that is not related to its trait dimension. As seen, this study tackled the traits of forgiveness and rumination levels of individuals. However, in other studies, which ascertained significant levels of relationship between rumination and forgiveness of others, it is remarked that they mostly included at least one of these traits' state-trait dimension and therefore different measurement tools were utilized (e.g., Karremens & Smith, 2010; McCullough, Bono & Root, 2007; Stoia-Caraballo et al., 2008). Consequently, we believe that this finding, which is not in line with the literature, was achieved in this study because both variables were regarded as dispositional features.

Discussion of Findings Related to the Prediction of Self-Forgiveness

The results of the study revealed that self-forgiveness was negatively predicted by personal distress and rumination in order of significance. There is only a limited

number of studies investigating the relationships between self-forgiveness and empathy. When studies that have separately evaluated four sub-scales of empathy are explored, it is seen that the present study achieved parallel findings, especially from the perspective of the relationship between personal distress and self-forgiveness. For example, studies by Hodgson and Wertheim (2007), Rangganadhan and Todorov (2010), and Tagney, Boone, and Dearing (2005) found that peoples' levels of self-forgiveness decreased as their personal distress levels increased. People begin to think that they have made a transgression and feel such emotions as guilt and shame when they become aware of the fact that some of their behavior actually hurt someone (Hall & Fincham, 2005). In such cases, it is thought that individuals with high levels of personal distress will feel even more distress in trying to understand the negative feelings of the person whom they had hurt and that they will begin to focus more on their own feelings, which are felt more intensively than the feelings of others and they therefore may have a hard time in forgiving themselves and instead keeping their negative feelings towards themselves alive.

The number of studies that have considered self-forgiveness and rumination together are limited. It is seen, however, that there is a parallel between the findings of this study and others. For instance, Barber, Maltby, and Macaskill (2005), in their study investigating the relationships between college students' levels of forgiveness and rumination, concluded that students' engagement with ruminative thoughts about their memories related to anger made it hard for them to forgive themselves. In addition to these, the results of two studies (Bugay, 2010; Bugay & Demir, 2011) exploring the levels of self-forgiveness in college students in Turkey also match with this finding of the study at hand. Both studies ascertained that rumination had a negative relation to self-forgiveness.

As a result, it is seen that this finding of the study is consistent with other arguments on self-forgiveness presented in the literature (Luskin, 2002; Worthington, 2006). As was also stated by Woodyatt and Wenzel (2013), in order for individuals—who feel that their acts hurt another person or themselves directly—to actually forgive themselves, they need to become aware of their own responsibilities, to understand feelings of guilt and their consequences, and to make cognitive efforts to cope with the condition in an effective and healthy way. Although individuals enter into an intensive and repetitive thought process during rumination, it is known that this tendency is rather distant from an active cognitive effort to solve the problem (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). It seems possible to argue that, in this case, individuals with a high tendency for rumination will be continually engaged in the feelings, like guilt and shame, that they feel about a problematic situation and in behavior like being angry at themselves, self-criticism, and questioning the concept of self instead of making an effort to transform their negative feelings about themselves into positive ones. Therefore, they will find it hard to forgive themselves.

The results of the study also showed that interpersonal cognitive distortions did not make a significant contribution to the prediction of individuals' levels of self-forgiveness. The process of self-forgiveness entails behavior during which individuals violate their own assumptions or principles about themselves rather than

their assumptions about others (Thompson et al., 2005; Worthington, 2013). The individual behaves in such a way that he or she cannot integrate with the concept of self and needs to reconstruct his or her beliefs about his or her own (Worthington, 2006, 2013). Therefore, an individual's non-functional assumptions about the nature of interpersonal relationships or how they should be might not have an effect on the questioning and interpretation process regarding one's self.

College counselors often come across clients who suffer because they feel they have been hurt by someone else or that they have hurt another person. Within this context, we believe that professionals who conduct forgiveness-based interventions can benefit from the findings of the present study regarding the possible factors related to their clients' forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness. For instance, first of all, evaluating possible cognitive distortions about interpersonal relationships and, if there are any, forming therapeutic environments where clients will be able to transform their irrational beliefs about interpersonal rejections into more functional ones would be helpful in regard to experiencing the process of interpersonal forgiveness. Thereafter, as emphasized by most of the studies (Hui & Chau, 2009; Sandage & Worthington, 2010), practices that will help develop the perspective taking or empathic concern skills of clients can be incorporated into counseling or psychoeducation sessions. In addition, according to the findings, practitioners should consider rumination cycles in the context of hurtful experiences rather than as a personality trait. Similarly, therapeutic processes can be structured so that clients who have problems with self-forgiveness can become aware of the ways in which they feed their own negative feelings towards themselves within the cycle of personal distress and ruminative thinking. Also, time can be allocated to activities or practices that contribute to decreasing clients' personal distress and trait rumination levels within the scope of counseling sessions modules. Additionally, forgiveness can be handled as a variable of some specific hurtful experiences and whether the predictor role of other variables will change or not can be investigated, in contrast to this study. Specifically, the relationship between rumination and forgiveness of others can be reevaluated within this scope. Moreover, the role played by the sub-scales of rumination, brooding, and reflecting in predicting forgiveness can be explored separately. Furthermore, researchers may contribute to the literature on the cognitive dimension of forgiveness by conducting different studies on whether individuals' general cognitive distortions are related to forgiveness of others and whether individuals' own fundamental assumptions about themselves and their distortions reflecting their beliefs are related to self-forgiveness or not.

Although the current study makes significant contributions to the existing knowledge of the relationships among the study's variables, it has some limitations. First, the study was conducted in a cross-sectional manner. Therefore, findings must be interpreted with caution regarding causal inferences about the direction of the relationships. Second, the data were collected through self-report measures. Thus, results might be affected by participants' tendency to give socially desirable responses. Future research would focus on gathering information about the forgiveness process of people using various qualitative techniques.

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Başkalarını ve Kendini Affetme: Bilişsel Çarpıtmalar, Empati ve Ruminasyonun Yordayıcı Rolü

Özet

Problem Durumu: Kişilerarası etkileşimin kaçınılmaz olduğu günümüz toplumunda; bireyler, başkaları tarafından incitildikleri ya da başkalarını incittikleri yaşantılarla sıklıkla karşı karşıya kalmaktadırlar. İncinme ya da incitme yaşantıları; öfke, intikam, suçluluk, utanç gibi olumsuz duyguları beraberinde getirmekte ve bireyin bu tür deneyimlerle etkili bir şekilde baş edememesi, depresyon ve kaygı gibi ruh sağlığı sorunları yaşamasıyla sonuçlanabilmektedir. Affedememe, bireyin yaşamındaki önemli stres kaynaklarından biri olarak görülmektedir. *Affetme ise,* bu stresli duygu durumuyla başa çıkmada kullanılabilecek etkili bir mekanizma olarak kabul edilmektedir. Affetmenin terapötik bir araç olarak psikolojik danışma uygulamalarında kullanılabilmesi için, öncelikle bireylerin kendilerini ya da başkalarını affetmeleriyle ilişkili faktörlerin neler olduğunun ortaya konulması gerekmektedir. Özellikle Batılı toplumlardan kökenini alarak geliştirilmiş olan modellerin çoğunda; affetme ile ilişkili olduğu düşünülen özelliklerden birinin empati olduğu vurgulanmaktadır. Empati ve empatinin alt boyutları ile başkalarını affetme arasındaki ilişkileri ortaya koyan çalışmalar bulunmakla birlikte, toplulukçu ya da ilişkisel kültürlerde söz konusu değişkenler arasındaki bağlantıları inceleyen çalışmaların görece sınırlı sayıda olduğu dikkat çekmektedir. Özellikle kendini affetme ile empati arasındaki ilişkilerin, gerek kuramsal gerekse ampirik çalışmalarla yeterince incelenmediği görülmektedir. Alanyazında, affetme sürecinde etkili olduğuna vurgu yapılan bir diğer psikolojik özellik ise ruminasyondur. Bireyin yapılan hataya ilişkin olayları, olayların sonuçlarını, hissettiği olumsuz duyguları tekrar tekrar düşünmesi, olumsuz duygu durumunu sürekli canlı tutmakta ve kişi, bu kısırdöngü içerisinde kendisini ya da başkalarını affetme konusunda güçlük çekmektedir. Psikolojik danışma alanında, konu ile ilgili yapılan çalışmalarda; ruminasyonun, hem başkalarını hem de kendini affetme ile olumsuz yönde ilişki gösterdiğini ortaya koyan çalışmalar olduğu görülmektedir. Ancak bireyin genel olarak ruminatif düşünme eğiliminin mi yoksa incinme ya da incitme durumuna özgü ruminasyon sürecinin mi affetmeyi etkilediği konusunda daha fazla çalışmaya ihtiyaç duyulduğu görülmektedir. Affetme; duygulardaki, davranışlardaki ve güdülerdeki değişimin yanı sıra bireyin bilişsel süreçlerindeki farklılaşmayı da beraberinde getiren bir süreçtir. Bireyler, dünyalarının ve kişilerarası ilişkilerinin nasıl olması gerektiğine ilişkin temel bazı varsayımlara sahiptirler ve hem kendilerinden hem de diğer insanlardan söz konusu ilkelere göre davranmalarını

beklemektedirler. İncinme ya da incitme yaşantıları ile birlikte bireylerin söz konusu varsayımları sarsılabilmekte ve affetme sürecinde bu algılarını yeniden yapılandırma ihtiyacı hissetmektedirler. Affetme temelli bazı müdahale çalışmalarında, bireylerin bilişsel çarpıtmaları ve otomatik düşüncelerinin yeniden ele alınmasına yönelik müdahalelere yer verilmesine karşın, affetme ve bilişsel yapının bu temel öğeleri arasındaki ilişkileri inceleyen çalışmaların oldukça sınırlı sayıda olduğu dikkat çekmektedir. Özellikle bireylerin kişilerarası ilişkilerin doğasına yönelik geliştirmiş olabilecekleri bazı inançlarının, affetmeye karar verme aşamasında engeller yaratabileceği düşünülmektedir. Bu durumda, bilişsel olarak karar verme ile başlayan affetme sürecini zorlaştıran birincil kaynaklardan biri; sanılanın aksine, empati kurma azlığı ya da ruminatif düşünme yüksekliğinden ziyade, bireyin ilişkilerle ilgili sahip olduğu bazı algılarıyla ilişkili görünmektedir. Bu bağlamda affetmenin psikolojik danışma uygulamalarına etkili bir şekilde dahil edilebilmesi için, özellikle Türk kültüründeki bireylerin hem kendilerini hem de başkalarını affetmeleriyle bağlantılı olabilecek psikolojik özellikleri ortaya koyan çalışmalar yapılmasına ihtiyaç duyulduğu görülmektedir.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu araştırmanın amacı, üniversite öğrencilerinin başkalarını ve kendini affetme düzeylerinin; ilişkilerle ilgili bilişsel çarpıtmalar, empati ve ruminasyon tarafından anlamlı düzeyde yordanıp yordanmadığının incelenmesidir.

Araştımanın Yöntemi: Araştırma, ilişkisel tarama modeline dayalı betimsel bir çalışmadır. Ankara ilindeki farklı üniversitelerde öğrenim görmekte olan 527 öğrencinin katılımı ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılar uygunluk örnekleme yoluyla çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir. Araştırmada katılımcılardan veri toplama amacıyla Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Heartland Affetme Ölçeği, Kişilerarası Tepkisellik İndeksi, Ruminasyon Ölçeği kısa formu ve İlişkilerle ilgili Bilişsel Çarpıtmalar Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Heartland Affetme Ölçeği; 18 maddeden oluşmaktadır ve 7'li Likert tipindedir. Ölçeğin başkalarını, kendini ve durumu affetme olmak üzere üç alt boyutu bulunmaktadır. Katılımcılarım empati düzeylerini ölçmek amacıyla kullanılan Kişilerarası Tepkisellik İndeksi ise 5'li Likert tipindedir ve 28 maddeden oluşmaktadır. Ölçeğin perspektif alma, empatik ilgi, kişisel rahatsızlık ve fantezi adı verilen dört alt boyutu bulunmaktadır. On maddeden oluşan Ruminasyon Ölçeği kısa formu ise 4'lü Likert tipindedir ve ölçeğin saplantılı düşünme ile derinlemesine düşünme şeklinde iki alt boyutu bulunmaktadır. İlişkilerle ilgili Bilişsel Çarpıtmalar Ölçeği ise 19 maddeden oluşan, 5'li Likert tipi bir ölçektir. Ölçeğin yakınlıktan kaçınma, gerçekçi olmayan ilişki beklentisi ve zihin okuma alt boyutlarından oluştuğu görülmektedir. Araştırmada İlişkilerle ilgili Bilişsel Çarpıtmalar Ölçeği'nin alt boyutları ve Kişilerarası Tepkisellik İndeksi'nin alt boyutları ile Ruminasyon Ölçeği kısa formu toplam puanlarının birlikte, başkalarını ve kendini affetme toplam puanlarını yordama gücü aşamalı çoklu doğrusal regresyon analizi aracılığıyla incelenmiştir. Katılımcıların kendini ve başkalarını affetme düzeyleri yordanan değişkenler olarak ele alınmış ve analizler her iki değişken için ayrı ayrı yürütülmüştür.

Araştırmanın Bulguları: Araştırma sonucunda; ilişkilerle ilgili bilişsel çarpıtmaların yakınlıktan kaçınma alt boyutu ile empatinin perspektif alma ve empatik ilgi alt

boyutlarının, başkalarını affetmenin anlamlı birer yordayıcısı oldukları ve söz konusu değişkenlerin birlikte başkalarını affetmedeki toplam varyansın yaklaşık %8'ini açıkladıkları bulunmuştur (R= .273, R^2 = .075, $F_{(3, 523)}$ = 14.077, p = .000). Değişkenlerin başkalarını affetmeyi açıklamadaki göreli önem sıraları incelendiği zaman; en güçlü yordayıcının yakınlıktan kaçınma olduğu (β= -.172) ve bunu sırasıyla perspektif almanın (β= .121) ve empatik ilginin (β= .107) takip ettiği görülmüştür. Değişkenlerin kendini affetmeyi yordamadaki rolleri incelendiği zaman ise; empatinin kişisel rahatsızlık alt boyutunun ve ruminasyonun anlamlı birer yordayıcı oldukları ve ilgili değişkenlerin birlikte kendini affetmedeki varyansın yaklaşık %8'ini açıkladıkları tespit edilmiştir (R= .282, R^2 = .079, $F_{(2, 524)}$ = 22.589, p = .000). Değişkenlerin göreli önem sırasının kişisel rahatsızlık (β= -.180) ve ruminasyon (β= -.176) şeklinde olduğu görülmüştür.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Önerileri: Araştırma sonucunda bireylerin kişilerarası ilişkilerinde yakınlıktan kaçınmaya yönelik düşünceleri ya da inançları azaldıkça ve perspektif alma ve empatik ilgi geliştirme düzeyleri arttıkça; başkalarına karşı affedici olma eğilimlerinin arttığı tespit edilmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra kişisel rahatsızlık düzeyi ve ruminatif düşünme eğilimi yüksek olan bireylerin ise yaptıkları hatalardan dolayı kendileri affetme konusunda zorlanabilecekleri sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu durumda özellikle başka bir bireyi affedemediği için zorlanan ve acı çeken danışanlarla çalışırken; öncelikle bireyin olası çarpıtılmış inançlarının olup olmadığının incelenmesinin ve bu inançlar üzerinde çalışılmasının daha etkili sonuçlar doğuracağı söylenebilir. Ayrıca affetme temelli bireysel ya da grupla psikolojik danışma uygulamalarına; yakınlıktan kaçınmaya yönelik inançları sorgulamaya ya da perspektif alma ve empatik ilgi geliştirmeye yönelik modüllerin eklenmesinin işlevsel olacağı düşünülmektedir. Bunların yanı sıra yaptığı bir hatadan dolayı kendini affetme konusunda sorunlar yaşayan bireylere sunulacak hizmetlerde ise kişisel rahatsızlık düzeyinin ya da ruminatif düşünme eğiliminin dengelenmesine dikkat edilmesinin önemli olduğu görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: affetme süreci, yakınlıktan kaçınma, perspektif alma, ruminatif düşünme.