

# The Effects of Perspective-Taking on Forgiveness



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## Abstract:

The current study replicated and extended prior experimental designs to examine the effect of perspective-taking on forgiveness. Specifically, the authors aimed to test the replicability of published perspective-taking interventions and **whether certain types of perspective-taking interventions are more effective than others at increasing forgiving responses in victims**. Some perspective-taking interventions have had inconsistent effects across different studies. Therefore, the authors modified perspective-taking interventions to improve upon those used in past studies that failed to replicate previous findings.

## Methods:

Participants completed an assessment of a past offense that happened to them personally, along with a rumination exercise (describing when it happened and how it affected their relationship with the person). Then, participants were assigned to one of five conditions.

- **Recall-Self:** Imagine a time they, the victim, offended someone.
  - **Imagine-Other:** Imagine what the offender thought and felt in the situation.
  - **Imagine-Self:** Imagine how they, the victim, would feel if they were in the offender's position.
  - **Victim Control:** Participants focus on their perspective as the victim in the situation.
  - **Vacation Control:** Participants are instructed to recall and describe details of a summer vacation they've taken in the past (redirecting their perspective from the offensive situation)
- Then, the participant would complete measures of resentment and forgiveness toward the offender.

## Hypotheses & Results:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Forgiveness scores will be higher, on average, in the perspective-taking conditions than in the control conditions.
  - **Results:** Accept the null.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Resentment scores will be lower, on average, in the perspective-taking conditions than in the control conditions.
  - **Results:** Accept the null.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Forgiveness and resentment will be negatively correlated.
  - **Results:** Rye Forgiveness scores and Rye Resentment scores were negatively correlated ( $-.34^{**}$ ). Additionally, Intentions to Forgive scores and Rye Resentment scores were negatively correlated ( $-.23^{**}$ ).

**Overall, the study did not find evidence that perspective-taking increased forgiveness scores nor lowered resentment scores compared to the controls.**

## Discussion:

### Possible Factors Affecting the Outcome:

- **The perceived severity of the offense.**
  - A victim of an offense perceived as more severe may be less inclined to forgive.
- **The time since the offense occurred.**
  - Victims may need time to process an offense before being able to forgive.
- **The time between the rumination exercise and the measures of forgiveness.**
  - The rumination exercise may promote negative feelings that affect an individual's cognitions.