

Stress as a Mediator of the Relationship between Forgiveness and Well-being: Depression and Aggression

Bridget R. Jeter, B. S.,¹ Ken G. Brewer, M. A.,² & Jon R. Webb, Ph. D.¹

¹ East Tennessee State University, Department of Psychology, Johnson City, Tennessee

² Kaplan University



INTRODUCTION

Empirical support for the association between forgiveness and health/well-being is growing

(Webb, Toussaint, & Conway-Williams, in press).

Experts have suggested that there is a salutary relationship between forgiveness and health/well-being and that, likewise, stress may be a key factor from cognitive, emotional, and physiological perspectives

(Maton, 1989; Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007).

However, not all students who endorse higher levels of stress will endorse increased depression or aggression, perhaps due to the protective factors of forgiveness.

Although the psychological study of forgiveness is burgeoning, little work has been done to assess the nuances of stress in the context of the forgiveness-health relationship

Purpose of the Study: To help improve the understanding of the relationship between forgiveness, stress, and two dimensions of well-being: depression and aggression.

General Hypothesis: Stress will mediate the relationship between forgiveness and depression and aggression, such that higher levels of forgiveness will be associated with lowers levels of stress, which, in turn, will be associated with greater well-being.

METHODS

Design & Participants:

- Cross-Sectional
- Undergraduate college students (n = 481)
- ♀ = 75.26%; n = 362
- Caucasian = 88.15%; n = 424
- $M_{age} = 22.17$; $SD = 6.03$

METHODS (con't)

Analysis:

Statistical mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008)

- Adjusted for demographic variables

Measures:

Demographic variables

(i.e., gender, age, education, ethnicity, marital status)

Religious Background and Behaviors

Questionnaire - Lifetime

(Connors, Tonigan, & Miller, 1996)

Depression Anxiety Stress Scales

(Lovibond, S. H. & Lovibond, P. F., 1995)

Multidimensional Measurement of Religion & Spirituality – Forgiveness Short Form

(Fetzer Institute, 1999)

Aggression (Buss & Perry, 1992)

RESULTS

For depression, the full model was significant ($R^2 = .61^{****}$).

- Only forgiveness of self was associated with depression.
- This relationship was partially mediated by stress.

For aggression, the full model was significant ($R^2 = .41^{****}$).

- Forgiveness of self was associated with aggression.
- This relationship was fully mediated by stress.
- Forgiveness of others had a direct inverse relationship to aggression

In sum, the association of forgiveness of self with depression and aggression was both direct and indirect, through stress; forgiveness of others was directly related to aggression.

DISCUSSION

Consistent with prior theory and research (Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Worthington, et al., 2007), our findings suggest that stress may play a role in the relationship between forgiveness and health/well-being.

However, much of the prior work has been in the context of forgiveness of others, only; in consideration of our findings, it appears that when multiple dimensions of forgiveness are measured, forgiveness of others may only be associated with aggression. (Harris, et al., 2006)

However, forgiveness of self is associated with well-being in the context of depression and aggression.

The association between higher levels of forgiveness of self and lower levels of stress may contribute to greater well-being by facilitating a positive outlook, lowering anxiety and depression, supporting the ability to cope, and future orientation (Zaleski, Levey-Thors, & Schiaffino, 1998).

Furthermore, this forgiveness-stress relationship may lessen the likelihood of health compromising behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use (Webb, Hirsch, & Toussaint, 2011; Zaleski, et al., 2007)

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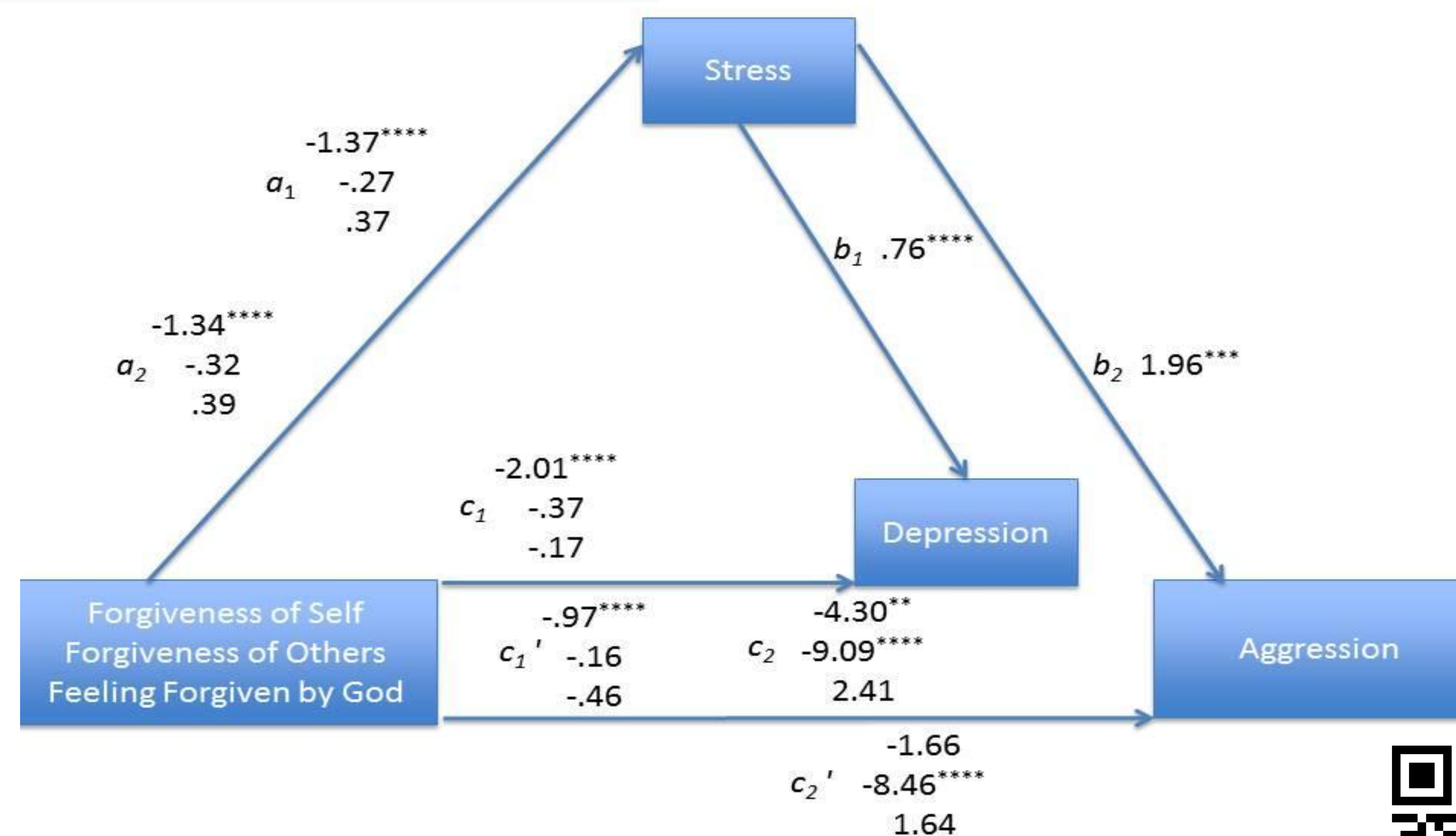


Figure 1: Effect of Forgiveness on Depression and Aggression as Stress
 $^{\dagger} p < .10$; $^* p \leq .05$; $^{**} p \leq .01$; $^{***} p \leq .001$; $^{****} p \leq .0001$

