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# The Development of an Implicit Association Test for Measuring Forgiveness

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## **Abstract**

The majority of psychological research on forgiveness has relied on self-report instruments as the primary mode of collecting data; there is a recognised need for alternative approaches to forgiveness measurement. This need is accentuated by the inherent/perceived 'prosocial' nature of forgiveness: there is a chance that people will self-report as more forgiving in order to present themselves as more socially desirable. Furthermore, a person may not always be consciously aware of their forgiving motivations, intentions or attitudes. Additionally, theorists typically frame forgiveness as a conscious, deliberate, controlled process, but it may also be comprised of more unconscious, spontaneous, and automatic components. Thus, self-report scales may be insufficient for exploring forgiveness. This thesis aimed to address these shortcomings by developing an Implicit Association Test (IAT: Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) suitable for the measurement of forgiveness. This forgiveness IAT was developed across 9 studies, with a total of 1304 participants. Studies 1 to 5 assessed the validity of the forgiveness IAT against several criteria: the choice of words and categories used to represent and compare with forgiveness; resistance to socially desirable responding; and convergence with self-reported forgiveness measures. Studies 6 to 9 assessed the forgiveness IAT's utility in predicting behavior, on the basis of recalled, hypothetical, and laboratory-based transgressions. Results suggest that the IAT is a valid, reliable, and useful measure of forgiveness attitudes, and may be able to predict some types of post-transgression behaviour that are not accounted for by existing self-report forgiveness measures. These findings will help psychologists to better understand the processes that drive forgiveness, particularly those operating at the automatic level.

## **Declaration**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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