



**University
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

PROGRAMME

The Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Department of Psychology

Jessica Rourke

2006
2003

University of Victoria
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MSc
BA (Honours)

“What are the Steps Involved in Self-Forgiveness?”

Friday, August 1, 2014
10:00 a.m.

David Turpin Building, room A132

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Robert Gifford, Department of Psychology, UVic (Supervisor)
Dr. Marsha Runtz, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)
Dr. Kathryn Belicki, Department of Psychology, Brock University
(Outside Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Suzanne Freedman, Faculty of Educational Psychology &
Foundations, University of Northern Iowa

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Kevin Kerr, Department of Writing, UVic

Abstract

Most forgiveness research focuses on the person harmed by a transgression and the benefits of granting forgiveness to the wrongdoer. This dissertation sought to contribute knowledge to the emerging field of forgiveness of the self. The aims of this study were to ascertain whether laypersons define self-forgiveness in the same manner as researchers and to explore the validity of a process-model of self-forgiveness. Of interest was also whether individuals in different stages of self-forgiveness differ in their beliefs and whether laypersons have the same understanding of self-forgiveness and the steps involved as the counsellors from whom they may seek guidance. Study 1 explored these questions in a sample of 121 undergraduate students, Study 2 in a sample of 189 members of the broader community, and Study 3 in a sample of 80 counsellors and psychologists. Participants provided a definition of self-forgiveness and put the hypothesized steps of self-forgiveness into a temporal order. Although there were differences in perspectives, participants tended to agree with researchers that self-forgiveness is letting go of negative thoughts and emotions, and adopting positive thoughts and emotions toward the self. However, participants went beyond this, stating that self-forgiveness is in large part learning to accept the self, moving on from the past, and growing from the experience. The majority of participants agreed that the steps proposed in the model are comprehensive of the self-forgiveness process. In each study, participants also agreed with the proposed ordering of approximately half of the units. However, students, community members, and counsellors had significantly different beliefs about the ordering each of the units. In addition, the ordering of the units often depended on the participant's stage in the process of self-forgiveness (e.g., have never felt the need to forgive myself, would like to forgive myself but have not begun, am in the process of forgiving myself, have fully forgiven myself). The results of this study have practical applications for future self-forgiveness researchers, laypersons searching for information about how to begin forgiving oneself, and counsellors who encounter clients struggling with guilt, shame, and self-blame.

Awards, Scholarships, Fellowships

2014	Winner, 3 Minute Thesis Competition University-Wide Finals, University of Victoria
2009	McCall Brothers Graduate Scholarship in Clinical Psychology
2009	Kappa Kappa Gamma Foundation of Canada Scholarship for Women
2006-2009	Canada Graduate Scholarships – Doctoral
2005-2006	SSHRC Council
2004-2005	Ontario Graduate Scholarship

Presentations

1. Rourke, J., Newton, A., McCurrach, D., & Gifford, R. (April 2012). *The effects of gratitude on well-being*. Poster Presentation, 92nd Western Psychological Association Annual Convention (refereed), San Francisco, California.
2. Gifford, R., Rourke, J., Scannell, L., Kormos, C., McIntyre, A. (June 2011). *Neighbourhood predictors of quality of life*. Poster Presentation, 72nd Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention (refereed), Toronto, ON.
3. Rourke J., Newton, A., & Gifford, R. (June 2011). *Well-being: The Role of Gratitude and Forgiveness*. Poster Presentation, 72nd Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention (refereed), Toronto, ON.
4. Rourke J., & Gifford, R. (August 2010). *The Applicability of Enright's Model of Forgiveness: A Case Study*. Poster Presentation, 118th American Psychological Association Annual Convention (refereed), San Diego, CA.

5. Rourke, J., & Gifford, R. (July 2010). *Is it Possible to Forgive a Murderer?* Poster Presentation, 27th International Congress of Psychology (refereed), Melbourne, Australia.
6. Rourke, J., Pozzebon, J. (June 2009). *Affective change following relaxation therapies: Massage and Yoga.* Poster Presentation, 70th Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention (refereed), Montreal, Quebec.
7. Gifford, R., Rourke, J., Kormos, C., & Scannell, L. (June, 2009). *Neighbourhood Predictors of Quality of Life.* Oral Presentation, 70th Canadian Psychological Association Annual Convention (refereed), Montreal, Quebec.

Publications

1. Belicki, K., Rourke, J., & McCarthy, M. (2008). *Potential Dangers of Empathy and Related Conundrums.* In, W. Malcom, N. DeCourville, K. Belicki (Eds.), *Women's Reflections on the Complexities of Forgiveness*, New York: Routledge Press.
2. Rourke, J. (September 2006). *Forgiveness-seeking Motives and Behaviours.* Abstract published in the American Psychological Association Brochure: *Forgiveness: A Sampling of Research Results.* Presented and distributed at 59th Annual DPI/NGO Conference, United Nations Headquarters, New York.