

Chapter 7

**SELF-FORGIVINGNESS:
FACTOR STRUCTURE AND RELATIONSHIPS
WITH PERSONALITY, CULTURE, PHYSICAL
SYMPTOMS, VIOLENT BEHAVIOR,
AND SEXUAL ABUSE DURING CHILDHOOD**

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ABSTRACT

The present set of six studies explored people's disposition to forgive the self (self-forgiveness) when they have done harm to another person, using a multi-factor questionnaire that was devised from both the Forgiveness Scale (Mullet et al., 2003) and the Disposition to Seek Forgiveness Scale (Chiaramello, Muñoz Sastre, & Mullet, 2008). Study 1

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explored the factor structure of self-forgiveness, and examined the relationships between self-forgiveness factors on the one hand, and self-esteem and subjective well-being on the other hand. Study 2 further examined the self-forgiveness model evidenced in Study 1, using confirmatory techniques and a different sample. It also examined the relationships between self-forgiveness and other forgiveness constructs, and with revenge and hostility. Study 3 examined the relationships between self-forgiveness, personality, health status, and drug consumption. Study 4 investigated the relationship between sexual abuse during childhood and self-forgiveness. Study 5 showed that the three-factor structure was also found in samples from Africa (Angola and Mozambique), Latin America (Brazil) and Southern Europe (Portugal). Finally, Study 6 showed that the structure was also found in a sample of prisoners.

Keywords: self-forgiveness, personality, health, incest, culture, violent behavior

INTRODUCTION

“Intrapersonal or self-forgiveness has been largely neglected by psychological researchers. The small body of literature on this topic has been generated principally by philosophers and thus has been more theoretical than empirical” (Hall & Fincham, 2008, p. 174). Self-forgiveness has been defined as “a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one’s own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love towards oneself” (Enright, 1996, p. 115), and as “a positive attitudinal shift in the feelings, actions, and beliefs about self following a self-perceived transgression or wrongdoing committed by the self” (Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008, p. 2).

The present set of studies explored people’s disposition to forgive themselves (self-forgiveness) when they have done harm to another person, using a multi-factor questionnaire that was devised from both the Forgiveness Scale (Mullet et al., 2003) and the Disposition to Seek Forgiveness Scale (Chiaramello, Muñoz Sastre, & Mullet, 2008). Study 1 explored the factor structure of self-forgiveness, and examined the relationships between self-forgiveness factors on the one hand, and self-esteem and subjective well-being on the other hand. Study 2 further examined the self-forgiveness model evidenced in Study 1, using confirmatory techniques and a different sample. It also examined the relationships between

self-forgiveness and other forgiveness constructs, and with revenge and hostility. Study 3 examined the relationships between self-forgiveness, personality, and health status. Study 4 investigated the relationship between sexual abuse during childhood and self-forgiveness. Study 5 examined the cross-cultural validity of the self-forgiveness scale using samples from Africa, Latin America and Southern Europe. Finally, Study 6 examined the validity of the self-forgiveness scale in a special population, namely incarcerated people.

The first empirical study that examined self-forgiveness was conducted by Mauger, Perry, Freeman, Grove, McBride, and McKinney (1992) who created a Forgiveness of Self Scale (FOSS) that contained items referring to many different constructs associated with self-forgiveness. Some items indisputably referred to self-forgiveness (e.g., “I find it hard to forgive myself for some things that I have done”), but other items referred to different constructs such as: guilt (e.g., “I feel guilty because I don’t do what I should for my loved ones”), apologizing (e.g., “I frequently apologize for myself”), and self-esteem or carelessness. Even if factor analysis classifies these different items under the same broad factor, this does not mean, as pointed out by Tangney, Boone, and Dearing (2005) and by Wohl et al. (2008), that the underlying broad construct is unitary and non-ambiguous.

There are alternative self-forgiveness scales (Tangney, Boone, Fee, & Reinsmith, 1999; Thompson et al., 2005; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002) but all these scales assumed self-forgiveness to be a one-dimensional disposition. There are, however, many reasons to believe that self-forgiveness is a complex disposition, involving more than just one factor. Fisher and Exline (2006) showed that Tangney’s scale on the one hand, and Mauger’s and Thompson’s scales on the other hand, were only moderately correlated (less than .30); that is, these two sets of scales probably tap into two different aspects of self-forgiveness. Analyzing the structure of state-forgiveness scales, Hall and Fincham (2005) distinguished true self-forgiveness from pseudo-self-forgiveness, and Wohl et al. (2008) evidenced two factors, one that was emotional and the other that was cognitive in character. Finally, the concept of self-compassion, which has recently enriched the literature on self and identity (Neff, 2003) – a concept that seems to be close in meaning to the concept of self-forgiveness – has been shown to involve at least three components: (a) extending kindness and understanding to oneself rather than harsh self-criticism, (b) holding one’s feelings in balanced awareness, and (c) seeing one’s experience as part of common human experience.

Our proposition was that the three-factor structure that has been shown to hold for the disposition to forgive others (forgivingness) and for the disposition to seek forgiveness from others (Chiaramello et al., 2008) should also be found, *mutatis mutandis*, in the case of self-forgivingness. One factor in this three-factor structure expresses basic hostility: hostility towards others (the Lasting Resentment factor in the case of forgivingness) or hostility towards self (the Inability to Seek Forgiveness). Regarding self-forgivingness, the expected corresponding factor should express what Neff (2003), in her model of self-compassion, has called harsh self-criticism; that is, lack of kindness and understanding towards oneself. In other words, there should be a factor corresponding to the tendency to experience remorse to the point that it may result in a lasting incapacity at forgiving oneself even in view of positive evidence (e.g., the person who was hurt has clearly forgiven the harm-doer). A factor expressing strong difficulties at forgiving the self in the case of genuine self-forgiveness has previously been reported by Hall and Fincham (2005, 2008). This unforgivingness of self factor should be negatively associated with self-esteem and subjective well-being (Neff, 2003).

Another factor in the three-factor structure expresses a capacity to take into account, before forgiving or before seeking for forgiveness, the circumstances in which the harm has been inflicted (the Sensitivity to Circumstances factor). For instance, this factor reflects the victim's ability to analyze the pro and cons of harmful situations, and to consider the many circumstances of these situations for deciding whether to forgive or not forgive. This sensitivity factor has been shown to be linked with emotional regulation (Suwartono, Prawasti, & Mullet, 2007), and with the way forgiveness is conceptualized (Ballester, Munoz Sastre, & Mullet, 2009). Regarding self-forgivingness, the expected factor should express what Neff (2003) termed mindfulness; that is, the capacity to hold one's painful thoughts and feelings in balanced awareness.

Finally, the third factor in this structure expresses readiness at forgiving others (the Unconditional Forgivingness factor) or at properly apologizing and seeking forgiveness (the Unconditional Seeking of Forgiveness factor). Regarding self-forgivingness, the expected factor should express what Neff (2003) termed the capacity to see one's experience as part of the human condition. In other words, there should be a factor expressing a healthy tendency at conditionally forgiving oneself; that is, at forgiving oneself in situations in which proper apologies had been offered to the victim, or the harm has been repaired and the victim has publicly forgiven. Hall and Fincham (2005, 2008) have already found a factor they termed pseudo self-

forgiveness that expressed the opposite idea: the capacity at forgiving oneself without considering the victim's needs. The expected third factor would be the exact opposite of Hall and Fincham's pseudo self-forgiveness factor.

STUDY 1

A series of items was created with the view of reflecting the three expected components of self-forgiveness, their structure was explored, and the relationships between the resulting self-forgiveness model and Mauger's FOSS were examined. It was hypothesized that the unforgiveness of self, and the conditional self-forgiveness components of the model, if evidenced, should be positively correlated with the FOSS.

The relationships between the self-forgiveness model and several variables that have been shown by Neff (2003) to moderately to strongly correlate with self-compassion – self-esteem and subjective well-being – were also examined. Based on findings by Fisher and Exline (2006), Romero et al. (2006), and Tangney et al. (2005), it was hypothesized that unforgiveness of self, if evidenced, should be negatively linked with these two constructs.

METHOD

Participants

The total number of participants was 167 (100 females and 67 males). They were aged 18 to 77 ($M = 37.65$, $SD = 15.12$): 18% had completed primary education, 27% had completed secondary education, and 55% had university degrees. Sixty-one percent declared believing in God, 21% attended church on a regular basis, and 88% declared often forgiving the people who had caused them harm. All participants were unpaid volunteers. They were recruited and tested by one research assistant, who was a psychology student trained in the technique of questionnaires. The research assistant contacted possible participants at the universities or on the street (usually close to commercial centers), explained the study, asked them to participate, and, if they agreed, arranged where and when to administer the questionnaire. The participation rate was moderate (56%).

Material

The first questionnaire was the provisional Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire. It was composed of 30 sentences expressing willingness to forgive the self under various circumstances (ten sentences for each of the expected factors). As indicated above, these items have been inspired from the Forgiveness (of Others) Questionnaire and from the Disposition to Seek Forgiveness Questionnaire. For instance, the item “As far as I am concerned, I don’t feel able to forgive even if the offender has begged for forgiveness” was modified to the item “I feel unable to forgive myself for the harm done to others even if the victim has told me that she has forgiven me”.

Examples of items are shown below. An 11-point unmarked scale was printed following each sentence. The extremes of the scales were labeled “Disagree completely” and “Completely agree.” The second questionnaire was the FOSS. The third and fourth questionnaires were the Self-esteem Questionnaire (Bachman, 1970) and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Additional questions dealt with demographic data.

Procedure

Each participant filled out the questionnaires individually (in a quiet environment at the university or at another site when preferred by the participants). Two versions of the questionnaires were used. They contained the same items but not in the same order. The second questionnaire’s items were presented in the reverse order in view of counterbalancing potential order effects. The experimenter was, in most cases, present when the participants filled in the questionnaire. It took approximately 40 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the raw data. Seven factors had eigenvalues higher than 1: 7.61, 3.57, 3.26, 1.41, 1.32, 1.05 and 1.01. A three-factor solution was chosen, and in order to obtain factors that were as independent as possible, this solution was subjected to VARIMAX rotation.

Table 1. Mean, range and standard deviation for the variables involved in Studies 1, 2 and 3. Correlation coefficients between variables

Variables	Unforgiveness of Self	Sensitivity	Conditional Self-Forg.	M	SD	Range
Study 1						
Age	.10	-.20	.14	37.65	15.11	18-77
Gender (% males)	-.06	-.13	.13	40		
Education	.00	.17	-.06			
Religious Involvement	-.04	-.10	.14	1.80	0.75	1-3
Forgiveness of Self	.58*	.01	.41*	3.97	1.76	0-10
Self-Esteem	-.55*	.09	-.24	7.32	1.71	0-10
Subjective Well-being	-.29*	.05	-.24	6.10	2.12	0-10
<i>M</i>	2.72	4.72	6.16			
<i>SD</i>	1.96	2.18	2.09			
Study 2						
Age	.13	-.10	.04	33.39	15.13	18-79
Gender (% males)	-.03	-.05	.17*	41		
Education	-.14	.11	.05			
Religious Involvement	.01	.01	.30*	1.80	0.82	1-3
Lasting Resentment	.30*	-.10	-.10	2.57	1.84	0-10
Sensitivity to Circumstances	-.15*	.57*	.07	5.89	2.13	0-10
Unconditional Forgiveness	-.09	.02	-.03	4.28	2.45	0-10
Inability to Seek Forgiveness	.27*	-.05	-.22*	2.51	2.06	0-10
Sensitivity to Circumstances	-.03	.52*	.03	4.81	2.13	0-10

Table 1. (Continued)

Variables	Unforgiveness of Self	Sensitivity	Conditional Self-Forg.	M	SD	Range
Unconditional Seeking of Forgiveness	-.02	.05	.14	4.71	2.03	0-10
Vengefulness	.13	.00	-.30*	2.12	1.08	0-10
Hostility	.21*	-.01	-.14	3.77	1.87	0-10
<i>M</i>	3.00	5.51	6.44			
<i>SD</i>	2.10	2.11	2.24			
Study 3						
Extraversion	-.20*	-.09	-.07	4.16	1.37	1-7
Agreeableness	-.06	-.07	.19*	5.14	1.03	1-7
Conscientiousness	-.18	-.03	.04	5.50	1.14	1-7
Emotional Stability	-.15	-.03	.01	4.27	1.41	1-7
Openness	.01	.00	.17	5.15	1.15	1-7
Paranoid Tendencies	.33*	.06	.01	2.52	1.15	1-7
Trait-Anxiety	.30*	.07	.10	3.42	1.09	1-7
Stress	.25*	.08	.09	3.44	1.28	1-7
CHIPS	.37*	.09	.14	1.72	0.51	1-5
Common Drugs	.35*	-.02	.11	1.27	0.33	1-5
<i>M</i>	3.25	4.96	5.83			
<i>SD</i>	2.04	1.91	1.79			
Range	0-10	0-10	0-10			

Table 2. Results of the Confirmatory factor analysis conducted on a subset of 15 items (Study 2)

Items	Factors			<i>t</i>
	I	II	III	
I feel unable to forgive myself for the harm done to others even if I have already tried to repair the consequences	.61			15.10
... even if the victim has told me she has forgiven me.	.77			21.94
... even if the consequences of the harm have disappeared	.57			13.58
The way I see the world leads me not to forgive myself for my bad conduct	.65			17.14
My personal philosophy (or my religious conviction) leads me to never forgive myself for the harm done to others	.49			10.70
I feel it is easier to forgive myself for the harm done to others when I feel good and everything is going well		.65		16.59
... once the negative consequences of it have disappeared		.66		16.78
... if my family or my friends invite me to do so		.58		13.79
... when I have tried to repair the negative consequences of my acts, and even if I have not been completely successful		.43		9.03
... for the harm I have done to someone I don't know well than for the harm I have done to someone I do know well		.53		12.14
I cannot forgive myself as long as I have not tried to repair the negative consequences of my acts			.85	30.66
... as long as I have not apologized for my bad behavior			.65	19.09
I can forgive myself once the harm done to others has disappeared			.63	17.90
I can easily forgive myself even if I have not repaired the negative consequences of my acts			-.53	-13.34
... even if the harm done to others was intentional			-.49	-11.67
Alpha Value	.79	.71	.78	
<i>M</i>	3.00	5.51	6.44	
<i>SD</i>	2.10	2.11	2.24	

The three-factor solution explained 49% of the variance. The first factor (19% of the variance) was identified as unforgivingness of self. The second factor (12% of the variance) was identified as sensitivity to circumstances before forgiving the self. The third factor (18% of the variance) was identified as conditional self-forgivingness. In other words, a clear three-factor structure was observed. This structure was consistent with Neff's (2003) views regarding self-compassion. Examples of items loading each factor are shown below.

For each factor, a mean score was computed by averaging the scores of the five items with the highest loading. Table 1 shows the correlations between these scores and the other variables. Conditional self-forgivingness and unforgivingness of self were both strongly linked with the FOSS.

A regression analysis with the FOSS as the criterion, and these two factors as the predictors showed that the multiple correlation was .62 and that both factors explained a significant part of the FOSS score (Betas = .50 and .24), $F(2,164) = 53.43, p < .001$.

Unforgivingness of self and conditional self-forgivingness were linked with self-esteem and well-being, and subsequent regression analyses showed that both explained independent parts of variances of self-esteem and well-being. Unforgivingness of self was, understandably, negatively linked with both self-esteem and well-being. This result was consistent with Neff's (2003) findings (see also Fisher & Exline, 2006; Romero et al., 2006). Interestingly, conditional self-forgivingness was negatively linked with well-being; that is, the ability to unconditionally forgive the self appeared conducive to feeling good. Finally, conditional self-forgivingness and sensitivity to circumstance appeared as more common dispositions than unforgivingness of self, $F(2,332) = 72.38, p < .001$.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was aimed at further examining the model evidenced in Study 1, using confirmatory techniques, and at relating self-forgivingness with the other forgiveness constructs, and with revenge and hostility. Firstly, it was hypothesized that the more participants reported unforgivingness of self, (a) the more they should report lasting resentment towards others, and lasting inability to ask for forgiveness, and (b) the more they should be characterized by feelings of general hostility. This hypothesis was based on Neff's (2003) suggestion that lack of kindness and understanding towards self is closely

associated with lack of kindness and understanding towards others. It is also based on findings by Chiamello et al. (2008) showing a positive relationship between lasting resentment and inability to seek forgiveness. It was also based on findings by Mauger et al. (1992), Ross, Kendall, Matters, Wrobel, and Rye (2004), and Ross, Hertenstein, and Wrobel (2007) showing a moderate correlation between forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness.

Secondly, it was hypothesized that the more the participants were sensitive to the circumstances before forgiving themselves, the more they should be sensitive to the circumstances before forgiving others or seeking forgiveness from others. In other words, mindfulness (Neff, 2003) should extend to all aspects of forgiveness (see also Chiamello et al., 2008). Thirdly, it was hypothesized that the more the participants were able to conditionally forgive themselves, the more they should be able to unconditionally forgive others and to seek forgiveness, and the less they should show vengeful behaviors. This hypothesis was based on Neff's (2003) suggestion of a general capacity to see one's experience as part of the human condition.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 457 people (272 females and 185 males) recruited in the same way as in Study 1. Their mean age was 33.39 years ($SD = 15.13$, Range: 18-79). Ninety-four participants had completed primary education, 252 had a secondary education, and 101 had a university degree.

Material and Procedure

The first questionnaire was the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire: Fifteen items with the highest loadings were selected from the pool of items used in Study 1 (see Table 2). The second questionnaire was the Forgiveness (of Others) Questionnaire, which also may include a willingness to avenge subscale (Munoz Sastre et al., 2005). The third questionnaire was the Disposition to Seek Forgiveness Questionnaire (Chiamello et al., 2008). The fourth questionnaire was the Hostility subscale from the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992). It was composed of eight items expressing general

hostility (e.g., I am suspicious of overly friendly strangers). The procedure was the same as in Study 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on the raw data (correlation matrix, maximum likelihood estimation). The model tested was the correlated three-factor model that was evidenced in Study 1 (see Table 2). All path coefficients were significant. The GFI value was .94 (CFI = .92). The X^2/df value was $234.77/84 = 2.79$. The RMSEA and RMR values were .06[.05-.07] and .06. Table 1 (center part) shows the correlation coefficients between the self-forgiveness factors (raw composite scores) and the other constructs.

As expected, unforgiveness of self positively correlated with lasting resentment towards others, with inability to seek forgiveness from others, and with hostility. In other words, the persons who, more than others, feel resentful towards themselves and unable to seek forgiveness when they have committed a harmful act also tend to feel, more than others, resentful and unable to forgive when they have been offended against. They are also characterized by a higher level of hostility. This finding was consistent with Neff's (2003) suggestions, and with findings by Mauger et al. (1992) and Ross et al. (2004, 2007).

As expected, sensitivity to circumstances before forgiving the self significantly and positively correlated with the other sensitivity factors. This finding was also consistent with Neff's (2003) suggestions (her mindfulness construct) and with findings by Chiaramello et al. (2008). Finally, as expected, conditional self-forgiveness was negatively correlated with inability to seek forgiveness and with vengefulness.

It was also significantly correlated with gender and with religious involvement. Conditional self-forgiveness was, however, not correlated with unconditional forgiveness.

This finding leads us to believe that Neff's (2003) third construct; that is, the capacity to see one's experience as part of the human condition, may possibly, regarding forgiveness, decompose itself into two independent components: full generosity towards others, and strict accountability towards self.

These two components are, however, positively correlated to the same variables: vengefulness and religious involvement.

STUDY 3

Study 3 was aimed at providing additional elements of validity for the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire. As self-compassion has been shown to be associated with personality and with psychological health (Neff, Rude, & Kikpatrick, 2007), the relationships between self-forgiveness, personality, and psychological health (level of experienced stress, paranoid tendencies, and trait-anxiety) were assessed. In addition, as forgiveness has been shown to be linked with physical symptoms and drug intake (e.g., Lawler-Row, Karremans, Scott, Edlis-Matityahou, & Edwards, 2008), the relationships between self-forgiveness and these variables were also assessed (as suggested by Lawler-Row et al., 2008, drug intake can be considered as a proxy for health status).

Based on the review by Mullet, Neto, and Rivière (2005) and on the findings by Neff et al. (2007), we expected that unforgiveness of self should be negatively correlated with emotional stability, and conditional self-forgiveness should be positively correlated with agreeableness. Based on the findings by Muñoz Sastre et al. (2005) and on the findings by Neff et al. (2007), we expected that unforgiveness of self should be positively associated with experienced stress, paranoid tendencies, and trait-anxiety. Based on the findings by Wilson, Milosevic, Carroll, Hart, and Hibbart (2008, see also, Lawler-Row et al., 2008), we expected that unforgiveness of self should be positively correlated with physical symptoms and drug intake.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 300 people (208 females and 92 males) recruited in the same way as in Studies 1 and 2. Their mean age was 35.89 years ($SD = 13.10$, Range: 18-81). Thirty-seven participants had completed primary education, 205 had a secondary education, and 58 had a university degree.

Material and Procedure

The material consisted of the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire, the Brief Measure of the Big Five Personality Domain (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann,

2003), the Trait-Anxiety Questionnaire (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970), the Global Measure of Perceived Stress (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983), the Paranoid Tendencies Questionnaire (Silver & Malone, 1993), the Physical Symptoms Inventory (CHIPS, Cohen & Hoberman, 1983), and a list of ten very common drugs (e.g., ADVIL, IMOVANE). Regarding common drug intake, the participants responded on a frequency of use scale ranging from Never take (1) to Very frequently take (5). The participants responded individually. It took them approximately 50 minutes to complete the battery of questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are shown in Table 1 (bottom part). As expected, conditional self-forgiveness was positively correlated with agreeableness, and unforgiveness of self was negatively correlated with emotional stability (but the later correlation was not significant at the chosen threshold; it was significant at .01 only). The negative correlation between unforgiveness of self and extraversion was, however, unexpected. The more extraverted an individual, the less this individual would experience unforgiveness of self. As expected, unforgiveness of self positively correlated with all the health measurements. Overall, these findings are consistent with the findings by Neff et al. (2007) and the findings by Wilson et al. (2008).

STUDY 4

Study 4 was, as Study 3, aimed at providing additional elements of validity for the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire. It examined the relationships between the experience of incest during childhood, self-forgiveness, and other forgiveness constructs. Our hypothesis was based on findings showing that incest survivors are “at a significantly greater risk than the general population for psychological health problems, such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, marital difficulties, suicidal ideation, self-blame and guilt, eating disorders, substance abuse, and conflictual interpersonal relations” (Freedman & Enright, 1996, p. 984). As a result, incest survivors would experience resentment towards themselves for any offense they have committed or any failure they have experienced in a stronger way

than people who have not been the victims of incest: Any harm they may have done to others should resurrect the one they have suffered. We also expected that incest survivors would, similarly, experience more lasting resentment towards others.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 22 people (20 females and 2 males) who had been sexually abused during childhood by one of their biological parents. Their mean age was 33.36 years ($SD = 10.68$, Range: 18-53). Nine of them had completed primary education, 11 had completed secondary education, and 2 have a university degree. They had recently consulted a psychiatrist but they had not started any psychological treatment at the time of the interview. None of them showed evidence of severe psychopathology, such as psychosis. The comparison group was the one used in Study 2.

Material and Procedure

The material consisted of the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire. It also consisted of the Forgiveness Questionnaire and the Disposition to Seek Forgiveness Questionnaire. The participants responded individually at the psychiatric unit. It took them approximately 50 minutes to complete the battery of questionnaires.

RESULTS

In order to assess the differences associated with the experience of incest, independent of gender (that, logically, differed in the two samples), nine MANOVAs were conducted with incest as the independent factor, gender as the covariate, and each of the nine sub-scale scores as the dependent factors. The significance threshold was set at .005.

Incest victims' lasting resentment towards self scores ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 2.39$) were significantly higher than non victims scores ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 2.12$),

$F(1,476) = 6.40, p < .02, \eta^2_p = .03$. Incest victims lasting resentment towards others scores ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.27$) were significantly higher than non victims scores ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.84$), $F(1,476) = 8.15, p < .005, \eta^2_p = .02$. Incest victims unconditional willingness to seek forgiveness scores ($M = 6.88, SD = 1.07$) were significantly higher than non victims scores ($M = 4.72, SD = 2.03$), $F(1,476) = 23.05, p < .005, \eta^2_p = .05$. No other significant effect was detected.

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that incest survivors would experience resentment towards self in a stronger way than other people was supported by the data. Incest victims did not differ, however, from other people in conditional self-forgiveness. In addition, incest survivors, more than other people (a) resented any offense in a strong, lasting way, and (b) showed themselves willing to apologize even for minor offenses or offenses that were purely unintentional.

In summary, incest victims, more than other people, (a) experience difficulties at fighting (appropriate) feelings of resentment towards themselves or towards others when they are the author or the victim of an offense or of a failure, and (b) think that apologies must be readily offered after any hurt (e.g., intentional or not intentional). This pattern of results perfectly fit the dramatic experience the incest victims have met in their lives. As victims of a very severe offense, they are, more than others, (a) reactive to any hurt that may be committed, by themselves or by others, and (b) expectant of a sincere apology from their offender.

STUDY 5

Study 5 examined, using confirmatory factor analyses, the three-factor structure of the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire among samples from Africa (Angola and Mozambique), Latin America (Brazil), and Southern Europe (Portugal). Regarding Portugal, we had good reasons to think that the three-factor structure would hold. Previous studies conducted with Portuguese samples have found the three-factor forgiveness of others structure (Mullet et al., 2003; Neto & Mullet, 2004; Neto, 2007). As the two three-factor structures – forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness – are parallel

structures, it seemed to be likely that a three-factor structure should also be evidenced among Portuguese participants.

Regarding Brazil, and although no previous study on forgiveness had been conducted in this country, it also seemed likely that the three-factor structure should be found, since, on the cultural level, Brazil and Portugal share many common characteristics. In addition, one study on the conceptualizations of forgiveness that was conducted in Latin America (Bagnulo, Munoz Sastre, & Mullet, 2009) showed that Latin Americans, unsurprisingly, conceptualized forgiveness in basically the same way as Europeans.

By contrast, regarding Angola and Mozambique, there was uncertainty about the possibility to replicate the three-factor self-forgiveness structure. In a study conducted on Congolese participants, Kadima Kadiangandu, Mullet & Vinsonneau (2001) found a reduced two-factor forgiveness structure, whereas in studies conducted on Rwandan victims of the genocide (Mukashema & Mullet, 2013) the three-factor structure was found. Also, in a study on the conceptualizations of forgiveness, which was conducted on Congolese participants (Kadima Kadiangandu, Gauché, Vinsonneau, & Mullet, 2007), the structure of conceptualizations that was found was identical to the one evidenced in Europe and in Latin America.

METHOD

Participants

The total number of participants was 682 (389 females and 293 males): 148 Angolans, 171 Brazilians, 112 Mozambicans, and 251 Portuguese. They were all students, and their mean age was 22.5 ($SD = 4.50$). They were all unpaid volunteers and recruited on the campus of their universities by research assistants who were psychology students trained in data-gathering techniques using questionnaires.

Material and Procedure

The questionnaire was, for the sake of brevity, composed of nine items taken from the self-forgiveness questionnaire. It was part of a larger cross-cultural study involving other constructs. These items were translated in

Portuguese, the common language in all four countries. Participants were also asked about their level of religious involvement (not believe in God, believer but not regular attendee, regular attendee to a church, temple or mosque).

Each participant answered individually in a quiet room at the university (the more frequent procedure). Two versions of the questionnaire were used that only differed in item order (direct or inverse). The experimenter was, in most cases, present when the participants filled in the questionnaires. It took approximately 10 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A series of three confirmatory analyses were conducted on the nine items (Africans, Brazilians, and Portuguese). Detailed results are shown in Table 3. In all cases the fit indices were judged satisfactory. Namely, the RSMEA values were always close to .08. Regarding lasting resentment toward self and conditional self-forgiveness, the mean values were close from one sample to another, ranging from 2.69 to 2.96, and from 5.17 to 5.20, respectively. Regarding sensitivity to circumstances, however, the mean values were slightly different: The Brazilians' score ($M = 5.24$) significantly differed from each of the other scores ($M = 4.26$ for Africans, and $M = 4.44$ for Portuguese), $p < .001$.

As expected, the three-factor structure was found in the Portuguese sample and in the Brazilian sample. It was also found in the African sample. In addition, although some significant differences have been found, the mean scores were very close from one sample to the other. It can be concluded that the nine-item reduced version of the Self-Forgiveness Scale has satisfying cross-cultural validity.

STUDY 6

Study 6 examined the three-factor structure of the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire among a sample of people who were incarcerated in penitential centers. Based on the findings by Menezes Fonseca, Neto, and Mullet (2012), we had good reasons to think that the three-factor structure would also hold in this special population but it seemed instructive to check the validity of the structure in a sample of persons who should, more than others, feel confronted

to the issue of self-forgiveness because they have committed, in the past, severe infractions or crimes. Study 6 was also aimed at comparing self-forgiveness scores among prisoners and non-prisoners.

METHOD

Participants

There were two groups of participants. The first group was composed of 430 prisoners (192 females and 238 males) who had been incarcerated in various penitentiary centers in the areas of Lisbon and Setubal, Portugal. They were aged 18-71 ($M = 35.11$, $SD = 10.95$). Forty-two percent of them have completed primary education; 29% of them have completed secondary education, and the remaining 29% have not completed primary education. Overall, severity of the condemnation ranged from 4 to 300 months ($M = 76.40$, $SD = 52.92$). Forty seven were homicide offenders, 24 were sex offenders and the remaining 359 were non-homicide, non-sex offenders (property offenders and /or drug offenders). These participants were non-paid volunteers who were interviewed by one female research assistant. The data collection began once the Ministry of Justice approved the study and formal authorizations were obtained from the directors of the prisons.

The second group was composed of 294 lay people (130 females, 164 males) living in the same areas as the prisoners. None of them has ever been condemned for violent acts. These participants were non-paid volunteers who were selected in order to match as far as possible the sample of prisoners regarding age, education, and religious involvement. They were aged 18-71 ($M = 33.31$, $SD = 11.56$). Thirty-eight percent of them have completed primary education; 34% of them have completed secondary education, and the remaining 28% have not completed primary education. The data collection began after the data collection for prisoners was completed.

Material and Procedure

The material was exactly the same as the one used in Study 4. The prisoners were interviewed in the receiving room of the prison. The other participants were interviewed in a quiet place, usually at home.

Table 3. Results of the CFA conducted on the data from Portugal (P), Angola and Mozambique (AM), and Brazil (B). Results of the CFA conducted on the data from the incarcerated persons (INC)

Items	Countries			
	P	AM	B	INC
I feel unable to forgive myself for the harm done to others even if I have already tried to repair the consequences	.52	.40	.61	.57
... even if the victim has told me she has forgiven me.	.85	.91	.85	.60
The way I see the world leads me not to forgive myself for my bad conduct	.54	.54	.80	.56
I feel it is easier to forgive myself for the harm done to others when I feel good and everything is going well	.55	.58	.56	.59
... once the negative consequences of it have disappeared	.60	.57	.72	.89
... if my family or my friends invite me to do so	.59	.59	.88	.66
I cannot forgive myself as long as I have not tried to repair the negative consequences of my acts	.47	.25	.38	.52
... as long as I have not apologized for my bad behavior	.77	.99	.74	.55
... as long as the harm done to others has not disappeared	.65	.43	.74	.74
GFI	.94	.96	.92	.97
CFI	.89	.91	.90	.95
RMSEA	.08	.07	.09	.05
Chi ² /df	2.67	2.33	2.91	2.42

* = $p < .001$.

It took about ten minutes to complete the questionnaire. Data gathering was conducted on an individual basis after informed consent was obtained.

RESULTS

As in Study 4, a confirmatory analysis was conducted on the nine items. Results for the prisoners are shown in Table 3 (right-hand column). As in Study 5, the fit indices were judged satisfactory. Namely, the RSMEA value was lower than .08. A series of MANOVAs were conducted with each of the three self-forgiveness variables as the dependent variables. The covariates were gender, religious involvement, education and age. Regarding lasting resentment towards self, homicide offenders ($M = 4.03$) significantly differed from the control group ($M = 3.32$), $F(1,336) = 5.08$, $p < .05$. Regarding sensitivity to circumstances, homicide offenders ($M = 4.72$), $F(1,336) = 10.26$, $p < .01$, and non-violent offenders ($M = 5.26$), $F(1,647) = 8.07$, $p < .01$, significantly differed from controls ($M=5.96$). Finally, regarding conditional self-forgiveness, homicide offenders ($M = 4.82$), $F(1,336) = 6.16$, $p < .01$, sex offenders ($M = 2.58$), $F(1,313) = 53.08$, $p < .001$, and non-violent offenders ($M = 4.73$), $F(1,647) = 9.92$, $p < .01$, significantly differed from controls ($M = 5.38$).

The three-factor structure was found in the sample of incarcerated people. It can be concluded that the nine-item reduced version of the Self-Forgiveness Questionnaire has satisfying validity in this particular sample. Homicide offenders showed a higher level of resentment towards themselves than control participants, but were less sensitive to circumstances, and more prone to unconditionally forgive themselves than control participants, which may attest of strong internal tensions. Sex offenders were much more prone to unconditionally forgive themselves than control participants. Finally, non-violent offenders were less sensitive to circumstances, and more prone to unconditionally forgive themselves than control participants.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This set of studies has demonstrated the usefulness of Neff's (2003) three-component self-compassion model in the domain of self-forgiveness. More generally, it also has demonstrated the usefulness of a global model of

compassion in the domain of forgivingness: (a) kindness and understanding to other and to oneself rather than harsh self-criticism, (b) mindfulness; that is, holding one's feelings regarding others and regarding oneself in balanced awareness, and (c) transcendence; that is, seeing one's experience as part of common human experience.

Lack of kindness and understanding may be viewed as associated with lasting resentment towards others when one has been the victim of an offense, and with inability to seek forgiveness and with unforgivingness of self when one is the author of the offense. It is also associated with a whole set of potentially deleterious elements: low self-esteem, introversion, neuroticism, paranoid tendencies, general anxiety, stress, low subjective well-being, general hostility, psychological and physical health, having been the victim of incest, and having committed homicide (e.g., Mullet, Neto, & Rivière, 2005; Muñoz Sastre, Vinsonneau, Chabrol, & Mullet, 2005; Natheghian, Shirinzadeh Dastgiri, & Mullet, 2015).

Mindfulness may be viewed as associated with sensitivity to circumstances when one has been the victim or the author of an offense. Previous studies have, among other things, shown that sensitivity to circumstances is associated with emotional regulation (notably reassessment), with the way forgiveness is conceptualized (notably as a process that may encourage repentance among offenders), and with the experience of a "sensitive" family during childhood (e.g., Akl & Mullet, 2010; Ballester, Muñoz Sastre, & Mullet, 2009; Suwartono, Prawasti, & Mullet, 2007). Sensitivity to circumstances has been shown to be lower among homicide offenders and among non-violent offenders.

Finally, transcendence may be viewed as associated with unconditional forgivingness (of others), unconditional seeking of forgiveness and conditional self-forgivingness. Transcendence has been shown to be associated with the ability to forgive in extreme circumstances (e.g., Mukashema & Mullet, 2013). Although conditional self-forgivingness seems not to be linked with the other constructs, it is linked with the same variables, namely religious involvement, and lack of vengefulness. It is understandable that, whether applied to self or to others, forgiveness does not obey the same standards. Seeing one's experience as part of the human condition surely implies that one adopts a forgiving attitude to one's offenders. It does not imply, however, that one adopts an all-forgiving attitude towards oneself: The only decent attitude is trying to repair the harm that has been done, offering sincere apologies, and seeking forgiveness. When these conditions have been fully or partly fulfilled, it remains, however, essential to forgive oneself and not stay trapped in self-

unforgiveness. Interestingly, conditional self-forgiveness was lower among sex offenders and homicide offenders.

Limitations

The first limitation resides in the way the samples were constituted. In Studies 1-3, participants were volunteers, and although special efforts were made to contact people from different gender, age, and educational levels, we are unsure about the representativeness of our samples. In Study 5, all participants were students because it was the only way to gather data in the different countries. The second limitation resides in the fact that what we have measured in the present study are self-reported forgiveness (to self or to others) practices, not actual forgiveness behaviors. It was, however shown in Study 4 and in Study 6 that these self reports were associated in a meaningful way with strong external indices.

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