The choice of forgiveness
Forgiveness of self and others focusing on situation and
personality

Magdalena Wedemalm

Handledare: Neda Kerimi
C-UPPSATS, 15 POÄNG 20

STOCKHOLMSUNIVERSITET
PSYKOLOGISKA INSTITUTIONEN

THE CHOICE OF FORGIVENESS-FORGIVENESS OF SELF AND OTHERS FOCUSING ON SITUATION AND PERSONALITY

Magdalena Wedemalm

Throughout the years research on forgiveness has expanded (Thompson et al., 2005). However it is only in recent years that forgiveness has been recognized as a concept with two components, forgiveness of self and others (Ross, Hertenstein & Wrobel, 2007). The aim of this study was to see how forgiveness of self and others differed, also taking into consideration variables such as situation and personality. One hundred participants completed a web-based questionnaire containing four forgiveness situations, the Heartland Forgiveness Scale and a personality test. The results from the forgiveness situations did not reveal any significant difference between forgiveness of self and others. However, the ratings of the Heartland Forgiveness Scale revealed that it was harder to forgive others. Also, it was found that participants differed in their forgiveness depending on what situation it was. In addition, individuals who scored low in the personality-type instability were less able to forgive others. It seems, therefore, that forgiveness of self and others do differ and also in the aspects of situation and personality.

In recent years forgiveness has increasingly been recognised as a concept with two components, forgiveness of self and others (Ross, Hertenstein & Wrobel, 2007). When this distinction was acknowledged, it awakened an interest for further investigations in studying the nature of these two components (Ross, Kendall, & Matters, 2004). Mauger (1992, referred in Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001) who was the first to develop a scale which measures both forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others, suggested a clear distinction between these two components (Mauger, 1992, referred to in Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001). Maltby et al (2001) studied these two components and recognised that they did indeed differ and concluded that a person who lacks self-forgiveness has an intro-punitive style, meaning that the individual views themselves as damaged and unworthy of acceptance. Lack of ability to forgive others, consequentially reflects an extra-punitive style, where the individual seeks revenge, holds grudges and continually blames others (Maltby et al, 2001). Considering the nature of these two components of forgiveness, researchers have concluded that they are in fact only modestly related to each other (Ross et al, 2004). This difference could mean that individuals act differently when they decide to forgive themselves and when they decide to forgive others. So where does that leave us, do people find it harder to forgive others or themselves? It has been argued that people tend to make harder judgements of themselves and therefore should find it easier to forgive others (Maltby, et al 2001). This study was set out to measure the two components of forgiveness and to see whether there was a difference between people's willingness to forgive others and to forgive themselves.

What is forgiveness?

Although the concept of forgiveness has existed since the 900's (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2010), it is only in recent years that theories and methods have been constructed to study it in a scientific way. Before constructing a study or developing an instrument for measuring forgiveness, researchers have to agree on a suitable definition (Thompson et al, 2005). Many attempts have been made to define forgiveness; however one of the common assumptions made is that forgiveness is equated with reconciliation. Reconciliation is where both parts have agreed and where a relationship is restored. Reconciliation requires both a change in the offender and the victim. (Enright, 1996). Contrarily, forgiveness only requires a change in one of those involved. Forgiveness can be offered unconditionally without requiring that both parts have agreed (Enright, 1996). Forgiveness is a personal decision which means that the victim or the offender leaves all feelings of resentment and moves on (Enright, 1996). Forgiveness is according to the Human Development Group, a steady change from being angry and not understanding, to a positive attitude which involves letting go of resentment and moving on (Human Development Group, 1991 referred to in Ross et al, 2004). This study was set out to measure forgiveness and not reconciliation. The following definition of forgiveness was used:

“Forgiveness is the framing of a perceived transgression such that one’s responses to the transgressor, transgression, and sequelae of the transgression are transformed from negative to neutral or positive. The source of a transgression, and therefore the object of forgiveness, may be oneself, another person or persons, or a situation that one views as being beyond anyone’s control (e.g., an illness, “fate,” or a natural disaster)” (Thompson et al, 2005).

Forgiveness of self and others

A common assumption made is that forgiveness is principally about forgiving others, however research has also found that forgiveness is about forgiveness of self (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). Forgiveness of others implies that individuals choose to forgive a transgressor who has treated them unjustly. Forgiveness is always an option, victims can either grant the offender their forgiveness or not. Forgiving others is a decision made by the victim, whilst forgiveness of self is a decision made by the offender. Self-forgiveness is where the individual is the offender who knows they have misbehaved and try to accept it. In other words, self-forgiveness is when the individual stops blaming themselves for their mistakes (Strelan & Covic, 2006). Research has found that individuals tend to make harsher judgements about themselves than others (Maltby et al, 2001). Individuals seem more open to make a fair judgment of other people’s behaviour than their own. This could suggest that individuals should find it harder to forgive themselves (Maltby, et al, 2001). In this study the focus is on the two different components of forgiveness and whether it might be harder to forgive others than yourself as suggested in some studies (Maltby et al, 2001). There are also other personality traits that might influence the way victims forgive themselves or others.

Forgiveness of self, others and the influence of personality

It has been argued that forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness differs in nature, but especially when personality-traits are taken into account (Ross et al, 2004). In the studies focused on forgiveness of others, it has been revealed that individuals who usually trust and sympathize with others tend to be more willing to forgive (Ross et al, 2004). Similarly, it has been shown that individuals are more forgiving of others if they have a high level of agreeableness and extraversion (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Maltby et al, 2001; Ross et al, 2004). Agreeableness means that individuals are trusting and empathetic (Ross et al, 2004). This personality trait influences forgiveness of others

because individuals who are trusting, might still trust the offender even after the offence. The victim might trust the offender to have learnt his/her lesson and will avoid repeating the mistake. The victim will continue to trust the offender and therefore also forgive. Agreeableness also means being empathetic, meaning that the victim understands that one can make mistakes sometimes and the victim can view the offence from the offender's perspective. For example; the victim understands that the offender had a bad day at work and therefore happened to take out his/her frustration on the victim (Fehr, Gelfand & Nag, 2010). Extraversion means being open to different circumstances, even the hard ones and seeking support. Persons who are open might be more willing to forgive, as they seek possibilities of changing rather than seeing the disadvantages (Ross, et al 2004, Walker & Gorsuch, 2000).

Studies have shown that individuals who feel lonely or rejected are less forgiving of themselves (Jones, Kamat & Row 2006). Fisher and Exline (2006) found that an ability to forgive ourselves is associated with lack of remorse and self-condemnation. These factors are necessary in order for victims to forgive themselves. A lack of remorse is necessary as forgiveness requires us to leave our sense of guilt behind and move on. Similarly, individuals who find it difficult to leave grudges behind or stop punishing themselves for their mistakes also find it harder to forgive themselves (Fisher & Exline, 2006). Researchers have also found that people are less forgiving of themselves when they are unstable (Lamb & Murphy, 2002). Many of the findings describe self-forgiveness to be a harder decision when people feel lonely, rejected and unstable, which suggests that self-forgiveness is linked with our self-value. One reason for this could be that people strive to be perfect, when this is not possible individuals find it difficult to accept failure (Lamb & Murphy, 2002).

Triangular Forgiveness Typology

In this study, the researcher has measured the difference between forgiveness of self and others by looking at the process of making the decision to forgive, to see what encourages the decision to forgive or not. A model named *the triangular forgiveness typology* was formed in a meta-analysis, with an aim to explain the road towards forgiveness (Fehr et al, 2010). This model explains that the choice of forgiveness involves three different aspects; cognition, affect and constraints. The cognitive aspect involves having an understanding of other people's opinions and behaviour. The cognitive aspect influences our decision to forgive, because it helps us to understand why the offender acted in a certain manner. It has been discovered that it is important to have an understanding of the situational factors involved, because if the victim does not find a reason for a person's behaviour they tend to be less forgiving (Fehr et al, 2010).

The aspect affect is how the victims feel when they have been treated unfairly (Fehr et al, 2010). If the feelings are unbearable, or if the individual is filled with a lot of hatred, it could influence their willingness to forgive. Also, factors such as the individual's emotional stability can have an effect. If the victim carries a lot of anger, the anger will decrease the likelihood of forgiving, as opposed to when the victim empathises with the offender, it is usually easier to forgive (Fehr et al, 2010).

Constraints describe factors beyond the offence which can influence the victim's willingness to forgive, such as the victim's relationship with the offender (Fehr et al, 2010). Individuals tend to be less forgiving towards spouse/family or close friends because the betrayal seems greater when the victim is abused by someone they trusted (Fehr et al, 2010). However, some might feel motivated to forgive in order to maintain a

socially desirable image, in other words, to seem to have good moral in their friends or family's eyes. Other constraints that influence the victim's decision of forgiveness are the victim's social-moral standards or the values of a religious system (Fehr et al, 2010). In this study the focus is on the aspects of cognition and affect. Cognition will be investigated by measuring participants understanding of different behaviour in various situations and how this is linked with their willingness to forgive. Affect will be measured mainly through the personality traits, a person who is unstable will be expected to be less forgiving of themselves (Jones et al, 2006).

Forgiveness in different situations

Individual's willingness to forgive is not only influenced by individual factors such as personality, but also by situational factors (Pronk, Karremana, Overbeek, Vermulst & Wigboldus, 2010). A persons willingness to forgive also seem to differ depending on how the situation looks and the choice of forgiveness will be harder, if the offence is perceived by the victim as severe and hurtful (Pronk et al, 2010). This is because the process of transforming the negative responses into positive ones will be a harder task in a very painful offence. In a painful offence the negative responses are more intense than in a less painful situation, therefore making forgiveness in a more severe situation more difficult (Pronk et al, 2010).

Aim

The aim of this study was to look at individual's decision to forgive, whether there was a difference between forgiving yourself and others. The aim was also to see whether the willingness to forgive differed depending on which situation it was. In addition, the researcher wanted to see whether personality influenced participant's decision, looking specifically at certain personality traits associated with forgiveness of self and personality traits linked with forgiveness of others. The difference with this study compared to other studies that had been made in the similar fields was that two different instruments of measuring forgiveness were used. The instruments used were the heartland forgiveness scale and a self-constructed questionnaire where participants had to read detailed situations and indicate their forgiveness. These two instruments measured forgiveness in two different ways; the heartland forgiveness scale measured forgiveness of self and others in general whilst the situations make it possible to measure individual's forgiveness of self and others in different situations. This is a different way of comparing forgiveness of self and others compared to earlier studies.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There would be a difference between forgiveness of self and others. This was tested by using the two different measuring instruments; the situations in the first part of the questionnaires and the Heartland Forgiveness Scale.

Hypothesis 2: Forgiving would differ in the four situations (part one of the questionnaire), both in situations when asked to forgive others (victims perspective) and when asked to forgive ourselves (offenders perspective). "

Hypothesis 3: A difference in personality would influence whether you find it easier to forgive yourself or/and others. Coherent with earlier research, individuals that score high points of agreeableness and lower points in stability should be more willing to forgive. In addition, I also studied whether there were other personality traits which correlated with forgiveness. This hypothesis will be measured with a personality test. Scores from this test were then compared to participants score on forgiveness.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of one hundred participants, 69 women and 31 men, between the ages of 15 and 79 ($M = 26.37$, $SD = 9.37$). Participants either responded to a note that was placed on the notice board at the Department of Psychology at Stockholm University, or responded to a facebook event that was created for the study. The participants were told that the purpose of the questionnaire was to look at decision-making in different situations. The first 50 participants, both students and those responding on facebook were sent a link with the first version of the questionnaire and the following 50 were sent a link to the second version of the questionnaire.

All the participants were ensured of their confidentiality as well as ethic guidelines such as the right to withdraw and their anonymity.

Material

Two versions of the questionnaires were used; version one and two which consisted of four different parts. Part one had been used and tested in a pilot study conducted by the researcher beforehand. Part one used a between-group design, where half of the group received one version of part one and the other half received another version. The two versions of part one contained four situations. The same four situations were used in each version, although they were described in either a victim's perspective or an offender's perspective. For example; in the first situation, 50 participants had to imagine themselves to be the victim and in the second version the other 50 participants were the offender. Being the victim meant that participants were asked to forgive themselves and being the offender meant that participants were asked to forgive others. In both version one and two, there were two situations read from the offender's perspective and two situations read from the victim's perspective. This made it possible to see whether there was a difference between forgiving yourself and forgiving other in the same situation. The reason why a within group design was used was to control for order effects, so that individuals were not influenced by the fact that they had read the same situation.

The first situation in version one described a scene where the participants had to imagine themselves to be a parent who quarrels with their child's partner. Participants were asked to be the offender. In the second version of the questionnaire the same situation was used although the perspectives were changed. This time the participant had to imagine themselves to be the child's partner i.e. the victim.

The second situation in version one, a scene was described where the participants had to imagine themselves as a victim of abuse from their parent. In version two the participants had to imagine themselves to be the parent i.e. the offender who abused their child.

The third situation in version one described a scene where the participants had committed a burglary in their friends shop i.e. the offender and in the second version the participants had to imagine themselves to be the friend i.e. the victim.

The last situation in version one described a scene where the participants had to imagine themselves to be a person whose partner had been unfaithful i.e. the victim. In the second version the participants had to imagine themselves as the partner who had been unfaithful i.e. the offender.

After each situation four different questions followed, the first one was "*I can understand the other persons behaviour*". This was meant to measure the participants understanding of the behaviour. Earlier studies have found that an understanding is

needed in order for us to forgive (Fehr et al, 2010). The second question was “*I consider this a serious situation*” and this measured how serious the participant thought this behaviour was. Studies have found that serious offences are harder to forgive (Pronk et al, 2010). This question was not further analysed because it was out of the scope. Another question was “*I have done wrong*”. This question measured whether participants believed they had behaved unfair or incorrect. The last question was “*the other person has done wrong*”. These two last questions helped controlling for participants understanding, that they had understood that they were the offender or the victim. Individuals were asked to mark on a scale from 1 to 100 their answer, 1 being “*Do not agree at all*” and 100 “*Agree entirely*”. When the situations had been read and questions were answered, participants were asked to state their perceived ability to forgive in each situation on a scale where 1 was “not at all forgiving” and 100 “entirely forgiving”, to measure each individual’s ability to forgive. Except for the different use of perspectives in these two versions of part one, the two questionnaires were identical. So, the parts described below were the same in both versions of the questionnaires.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of the Heartland forgiveness scale (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). The scale has proved to be a valid and reliable measurement of forgiveness (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). The scale is based on a definition that describes forgiveness as a growing change in the victim’s response towards the transgressor (Thompson et al, 2005). The change goes from a negative, towards a neutral and then positive attitude. The definition includes three different sources in a transgression: yourself, another person or persons, and situations that are beyond your control such as illnesses and natural disasters (Thompson et al, 2005). It contains different statements that the participant has to answer on a five-point scale. For example, one statement is “*I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me*”. Participants were then asked to give their response where one was *Almost always false of me* and five was *Almost always true of me*. The scale was used in this study as explain to the participants that it measured forgiveness. Many try to seem more forgiving than they are as it is more socially accepted; however when using this scale that is not a problem, this therefore increases the validity because it measures what it set out to measure without participant bias. (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). The scale contained 18 items which measured dispositional forgiveness of self, others and situations beyond anyone's control such as natural disasters and illness. The scale is known to have strong internal consistency reliability and test-retest reliability (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). It was translated into Swedish and inserted into the questionnaires; the translation was controlled and checked by the researcher’s fellow adviser. Individuals were asked about their typical response and coping in certain situations. For example, a question stated “*I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me*”. Participants were then asked to give their response on a 5-point scale where 1 was *Almost always false of me* and 5 was *Almost always true of me*.

The third part was a personality questionnaire called the *Big five short* which was based on the International personality item pool (Goldberg (1999) cited in Ashton & Lee, 2005). It measures the individual’s degree of conscientiousness, stability, agreeableness, openness and extroversion. It consists of 52 short statements where participants state their answers on a five-point scale, 1 being *Do not agree at all* and 5 being *Agree entirely*. One example of a statement was *I’m quiet among strangers*.

At the end of the questionnaires participants were asked an open question of what they believed this study was about, to help control for biased answers They were also asked to state their gender and age. Another question they were asked was *Are you religious?*

followed by an explanation to how religious was defined according to the researcher. It was stated that being religious means that an individual actively live according to their faith. Lastly participants were asked to explain what they believed the difference was between forgiveness of self and others were.

Results

Forgiveness of self and others

The data from the two versions of the questionnaires was compared and two new variables were created. The data from the situations with the offender's perspective was put into a new variable called self-forgiveness, this was because participants in these situations had been asked how willing they were to forgive themselves. The data from the situations which had to do with the victims perspective was placed in a variable called forgiveness of others, because participants had been asked how willing they were to forgive person whom they been mistreated by. The total score for participants' willingness to forgive themselves and others indicated that they were a little more forgiving towards others (Table 1). However this effect was not significant.

Forgiveness in different situations

Version One

There were four situations in each version of the questionnaire. Two situations described from the offenders perspective and two described from the victims perspective. Looking at all situations, a paired sample t-test with the situations as the independent variable and ability to forgive as the dependent variable revealed a significant difference in participants willingness to forgive in situation one and three ($t(50) = 3.31$, $p = 0.002$). Both of these were situations from the offender's perspective thus asking how willing participants were to forgive themselves. Participants were more likely to forgive themselves in situation one, which described a parent's quarrel with their child's partner, than in situation three, which described a committed burglary (Table 1). No other significant effects between the different situations and forgiveness were found.

Version Two

A paired sample t-test also revealed a significant difference in forgiveness in situation one, again the quarrel with the parent and their child's partner, but this time from the victims perspective and situation two from the offenders perspective, describing a parents abuse of their child ($t(48) = 3.01$, $p = 0.004$ (Table 1). Participants indicated to be more forgiving in situation one than in situation two (Table 1). No other significant effects between the different situations were found.

Table 1: The means (standard deviations) of the participants willingness to forgive themselves and others in the four different situations when the data from version one and version two was compared.

	Forgiveness	
	Victims perspective (n=50)	Offenders perspective (n=50)
Situation 1	69,4(31.6)	67,6(30,6)
Situation 2	50,2(31,8)	41,2(37,9)
Situation 3	52,6(37,4)	54,7(33,9)
Situation 4	38,5(35,6)	41,5(33,1)
Total	50,4(18,4)	51,8(20,4)

The Heartland forgiveness scale

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale was the same for all participants, in both varieties of the questionnaires. A one way ANOVA was used, the dependent variable being the participant's ability to forgive and the independent variable being the sub-scales within the Heartland Forgiveness Scale which assessed forgiveness of self, others and situations. The results from the Heartland Forgiveness Scale revealed that participants were significantly more forgiving of themselves ($M=19.8$, $SD=3.2$) than others ($M=18.2$, $SD=3.2$), $F_{2,97}=2.2$, $p>0.012$. In addition, a one-way ANOVA showed that participants were more forgiving of themselves ($M=19.8$, $SD=3.2$), than of a situation ($M=18.4$, $SD=2.8$) ($F_{2,97}=2.6$, $p<0.004$). No other significant results were found.

Personality and forgiveness

Looking at each specific situation, a one-way ANOVA was used and it revealed a significant effect between forgiveness(dependent variable) in situation (victims perspective) and the personality trait agreeableness(independent variable), $F_{5,44}=2.8$, $p<0.013$. Participants, who were more forgiving of others ($M=69.37$, $SD=31.61$) in that situation, also scored high in the personality trait agreeableness ($M=17.90$, $SD=2.10$). Another significant effect was between forgiveness (dependent variable) in situation one (offenders perspective) and stability (independent variable), $F_{5,44}=2.7$, $p>0.009$. Participants were more likely to forgive themselves ($M=67.57$, $SD=30.56$) if they scored low in stability ($M=30.22$, $SD=3.89$).

The personality test revealed only two significant effects between forgiveness in the Heartland Forgiveness Scale and personality traits. A one way ANOVA showed a significant effect between stability (independent variable) and forgiveness of others (dependent variable) $F_{19,73}=1.93$, $p<0.023$. When participants had low scores in stability ($MD=30.22$, $SD=3.9$) the less able they were to forgive others ($MD=18.5$, $SD=2,9$). Also a significant effect was found between forgiveness of situation ($MD=18.5$, $SD=2.9$) and the personality trait stability, $F_{19,73}=0.06$, $p<0.006$. No other significant effects were found.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain better understanding of forgiveness and to see whether there was a significant difference between forgiveness of self and others, whilst also focusing on situations and personality. Earlier studies had distinguished and recognised a difference between these two components of forgiveness (Maltby et al, 2001).

Forgiveness of self and others

The first hypothesis was that participants would find it harder to forgive themselves than others. In this study this hypothesis was not supported. The results from the first part of the questionnaires revealed that in situation one and two participants indicated to be more forgiving of themselves, whilst in situation three and four they were more forgiving of others. When comparing the total scores of forgiveness of self and others the participants seemed less able to forgive others, but this difference was very small and not significant. The results from the heartland forgiveness scale revealed a significant difference between forgiveness of self and others. The participants showed greater willingness to forgive themselves than others. One possible explanation to this finding is that individuals might view themselves in a better light. People could have a tendency to see others errors instead of working on their own flaws. This could make people judge others behaviour as more severe than their own, therefore making it easier to forgive themselves than others. The results from the heartland forgiveness scale and the results from the situations from part one differed. The results from the situations revealed that participants were a little more forgiving towards others, whilst the heartland forgiveness scale revealed that participants were more likely to forgive themselves. The reason for this difference could be the use of two different measurement techniques. The first part of the questionnaire was supposed to measure participant's willingness to forgive in four different situations. These situations were perhaps events which participants experienced in reality or could at least imagine themselves to be in. This made it a realistic and also an ethical measurement of forgiveness. However an implication with this technique was that the researcher could not be sure the participant gave a true response or socially accepted response. Sometimes individuals want to seem more forgiving than they are which has a negative impact on the results (Thompson & Snyder, 2003). However, because the heartland forgiveness scale did not reveal specifically what it was measuring, the participants might have given realistic responses. This strengthened the results of the research, and made these findings from the heartland forgiveness scale more valid and accurate.

However, there is also an issue with the different definitions of forgiveness. The heartland forgiveness scale used one definition and developed their scale inspired by that definition. In the four situations the participants were asked to state their forgiveness, not taking into account that each participant might have a different definition of the concept. Some might view forgiveness as reconciling with the offender or accepting the behaviour of others, and was thereby influenced when responding. So we cannot know for sure that the forgiveness measured in the four situations is the same forgiveness measured in the heartland forgiveness scale. On the other hand, the situations did make it possible to compare forgiveness in different situations to see how seriousness and severity of the event influences our forgiveness of self and others. Future studies should include a definition of forgiveness when using situations as a measurement.

Forgiveness in different situations

The second hypothesis was that participant's ability to forgive would differ in the four different situations and this was to a certain extent supported in this study. When comparing the difference of forgiveness between each situation, the study revealed that participants differed in their willingness to forgive depending on which situation they were in, thus the hypothesis was supported. In version one of the first part of the questionnaire, a significant difference was found between their ability to forgive themselves in situation one and in situation three. Both of these situations were described from the offender's perspective, therefore asking participants to forgive themselves. Participants showed more willingness to forgive themselves in situation one than in situation two. Situation one described a situation where the participants had to imagine themselves to be a parent who was quarrelling with their child's partner. Situation two was where participants had to imagine themselves to have committed a burglary in their friend's shop. The difference in the responses to situation one and two could suggest that participants viewed situation one as less serious than situation three. Committing a burglary in a friend's shop might go against all the participants' morals and standards; and because of that they would find it harder to forgive themselves in this situation. Whilst fighting with their child's partner could seem more likely to happen and therefore easier to accept and move on.

In version two of the questionnaire, results showed that participants were more forgiving in situation one (victims perspective) than in situation two (offenders perspective). Situation one (described above) asked participants to imagine being in a quarrel with their partner's parent. This situation measured forgiveness of others because the parent was unfair in his/her behaviour. Situation three (offenders perspective) described a parent's abuse of their child. One possible explanation to why participants were more forgiving in situation one than two, could again be because participants viewed situation one as less serious than situation two. Forgiving your partner's parent for being unfair is probably easier than forgiving yourself for child abuse. These results go in line with earlier findings which state that more severe events are harder to forgive. This is because the process of transforming the negative responses into positive ones is a harder task in a very painful offence. In a painful offence the negative responses are more intense than in a less painful situation, therefore making forgiveness more difficult (Pronk et al, 2010).

Forgiveness of self, others and the influence of personality

The third hypothesis was that a difference in personality would influence our willingness to forgive others and ourselves. It was suggested that individuals who scored high in agreeableness and/or low in stability would be more willing to forgive. The results did however not support this hypothesis. In this study participants were measured on conscientiousness, stability, agreeableness, openness and extroversion. The results revealed that on average individuals scored higher on the items of agreeableness, openness and extroversion than in the other personality traits. This suggests that participants within this study had a more forgiving personality. Research has suggested that individuals with higher scores in agreeableness, openness and extroversion should find it easier to forgive than those with higher scores in stability. (Hall & Frank, 2005; Maltby et al, 2001, Ross et al, 2004).

Comparisons were made to look for significant differences between personality types and forgiveness. In the first part of the questionnaire, a link between forgiveness of others in situation one and the personality trait agreeableness was found. Participants

were more likely to forgive others in situation one if they scored high in agreeableness. This agrees with earlier findings which suggest that this is because a person who scores high in agreeableness find it easier to understand the offenders perspective and can even emphasise with the offender (Fehr et al, 2010). Therefore participants could maybe emphasise with their partner's parent and understand that maybe he/she was going through a tough time. Also participants were less likely to forgive themselves in situation one if they scored low in stability. Interestingly a link between forgiveness of others and stability was found. This suggests that if individuals score low in stability they also seem less able to forgive others. None of the findings showed a link between lack of stability and forgiveness of self, earlier studies had suggested that individuals who feel lonely or rejected and has a bad self-esteem would find it harder to forgive themselves (Maltby et al, 2001). However, no findings in this study confirmed this, instead a link between forgiving others and stability was found. One possible explanation to this finding is maybe that participants who score low in stability would take everything personally. They would maybe assume the offender did it deliberately instead of thinking of possible explanations which could have caused the offender to act the way he/she did.

Validity and Reliability

This study has revealed some interesting findings, but it also contains some limitations. Firstly, it is hard to generalise these findings to the rest of the population as the sample only consisted of 100 participants and most of them were students. It cannot therefore be suggested that people in general find it harder to forgive others or that unstable individuals find it harder to forgive others. If the sample had been more varied in age, occupation, religion and gender, we might have obtained different results. Also, all participants were Swedish, there could be a difference in cultures. Sweden is known to be a country where career is a large focus in the Swedish citizens life, sometimes even family or friends are put aside in order to fulfil dreams, suggesting a quite self-centred culture, however in other countries there might be more focus on prioritising family and friends. Therefore in Sweden people might find it harder to forgive others as they tend to put themselves first, whilst in another country it might be the opposite.

A second shortcoming is concerning the IPIP. The personality questionnaire IPIP has proved to be a reliable measurement of personality, however external factors can still affect the results. For example, in this study the questionnaire consisted of four parts, where the IPIP was the third part. Participants could have lost their concentration or become tired by the time they were filling out the IPIP. This could have affected their answers; maybe they rushed through the questions and gave hasty answers. This would affect the validity of the findings as it cannot be confirmed that the IPIP revealed the participants personality. Also we tend to have a biased view of ourselves, participants could have stated more agreeable answers. Therefore, the researcher cannot conclude that the results reflected the true personality of the participants.

Other limitations within this study were the lack of the researchers presence, as the participants completed the questionnaire on a web-page, the researcher was not there to help or explain. All participants were given instructions, however there might have been some confusion regarding questions, where no clarification was given. Therefore the validity of the results could be questioned. On the other hand, the lack of the researcher's presence could have increased the anonymity of the study and hence led to participants being more honest. Another interesting point to make is the great amount of religious participants, seventy out of the hundred participants stated that they were

religious. Whether this influenced their ability to forgive is hard to be sure, although some studies has suggested that religious participants are more forgiving (Fox & Thomas, 2008; McCullough & Worthington, 1999). Thus, maybe participants in this study were on average more forgiving than the normal population, therefore affecting the results generalizability.

In conclusion, the findings from the heartland forgiveness scale revealed that it was harder to forgive others than yourself, which was interesting as the research indicated it would be the opposite. The findings from this study also indicated that our ability to forgive differ depends on the situation, this should be investigated further by comparing our ability to forgive in a very serious event to an everyday situation. The results also revealed a link between forgiveness of others and stability, the reasons behind these findings is yet to be found, so future studies should investigate this further. Furthermore, this study should be replicated with a larger and more varied sample in order to get more generalized findings.

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