

SELF-FORGIVENESS, SELF-ACCEPTANCE OR INTRAPERSONAL RESTORATION? OPEN ISSUES IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FORGIVENESS

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Los primeros intentos de abordar conceptualmente el perdón a uno mismo tendieron a considerarlo en el contexto de la teoría del perdón interpersonal, tratando de encontrar paralelismos entre ambas formas de perdón. Sin embargo, hay datos que cuestionan que pueda ser considerado simplemente un tipo más de perdón, y apuntan a que el perdón a los demás y el perdón a uno mismo podrían estar basados en factores psicológicos muy diferentes. El artículo revisa el conocimiento disponible hasta ahora y presenta una propuesta de lo que sería el curso temporal del perdón a uno mismo, recogiendo los elementos de los principales modelos teóricos para ofrecer al lector una visión completa, ordenada y coherente del proceso. Se concluye que la mejor perspectiva para comprender el autoperdón es estudiarlo desde la perspectiva del ofensor, entendiendo al sujeto como alguien que debe buscar y recibir perdón, no como alguien que debe darlo.

Palabras clave: Perdón a uno mismo, Búsqueda de perdón, Autoaceptación.

The first attempts to conceptually address self-forgiveness tended to consider it based on the findings of the theory of interpersonal forgiveness, aiming to find parallels between the two forms of forgiveness. However, there are empirical data that question whether self-forgiveness can be considered to be just another type of forgiveness, since interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness are based on very different psychological factors. This paper reviews the knowledge available to date and presents a proposal about the temporal course of self-forgiveness, bringing together the elements of the main theoretical models to provide the reader with a complete and coherent view of the process. We conclude that the best approach to understanding self-forgiveness is to consider it from the perspective of the offender, understanding the subject as someone who must seek and receive forgiveness, rather than someone who should grant it.

Key words: Self-forgiveness, Forgiveness seeking, Self-acceptance.

In the field of psychology, forgiveness was not considered an interesting subject of study until a few years ago; the research on this issue outside our country began to be significant in the 90s, whereas in Spain the scientific literature on forgiveness started to appear from 2010 onwards.

There is a large volume of work on forgiveness that has highlighted the benefits derived from the act of forgiving, not only on a personal level but also in the area of interpersonal relationships, highlighting its applicability in various therapeutic contexts, for a variety of problems and a large number of people. Forgiveness can be a powerful clinical tool for a variety of clients, as shown by the studies that have been conducted with survivors of incest, maltreated women, cancer patients, terminal patients, adolescents at risk, substance abuse, etc.

The existing data reflect limited use and scarcely known techniques for facilitating forgiveness in the clinical setting (Gordon & Baucom, 1998; Wade, Johnson & Meyer, 2008). There has been some resistance from mental

health professionals with regards to introducing forgiveness issues into their therapeutic tasks (Denton & Martin, 1998). Part of this resistance may be due to the belief that it is related more to the theological than the psychological arena, and the assumption that this field of work is typical of therapists with strong religious beliefs. Secondly, forgiveness has been a controversial construct in the field of mental health; there are authors who see it as the process by which the victim is blamed and the aggressor is absolved of guilt and responsibility, placing the victim in a position of a person hurt by another (Sells & Hargrave, 1998). Finally, another possible reason is the lack of knowledge about specific clinical tools with sufficient empirical support for working with these issues. Several authors have noted the existence of a considerable gap between the knowledge obtained by research and the knowledge available to therapists.

SELF-FORGIVENESS

Within the field of the psychology of forgiveness, self-forgiveness is one of the least studied topics. Self-forgiveness has been defined as the desire to abandon self-resentment by recognising that one has made an

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objective mistake, encouraging compassion, generosity or self-love (Enright, 1996). It can be understood both as a specific conduct, aimed at specific offences in which the subject has harmed others or himself (specific forgiveness) and as a personality trait, a tendency to forgive oneself in different situations and over time (dispositional forgiveness).

Different studies show indicators of the relevance of self-forgiveness in mental health. For example, a relationship has been found between dispositional self-forgiveness and high self-esteem (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Mauger, Perry, Freemant, Grove, McBride, & McKinney, 1992), life satisfaction (Hall & Fincham, 2005) and psychological well-being (Jacinto, 2010; Tangney, Boone, & Dearing, 2005; Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008).

Also, the failure to forgive oneself seems to predict low self-esteem (Mauger et al, 1992) and high levels of guilt (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Lack of self-forgiveness is associated with higher levels of psychopathology, including neuroticism (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Ross, Kendall, Matterns, Wrobel, & Rye, 2004), depression or anxiety (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001; Mauger et al., 1992; Romero et al., 2006; Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001; Witvliet, Phipps, Feldman, & Beckham, 2004; Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008) and a decrease in general life satisfaction (Thompson et al., 2005).

Some authors have also found an interesting association between self-forgiveness and prosocial behaviours and attitudes (Hall & Fincham, 2005), such as kindness (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002) or the facility to forgive others (Thompson et al., 2005). Wohl, Pychyl, and Bennett (2010) found that self-forgiveness reduced procrastination in university students.

Self-forgiveness is related to mental health and well-being even more intensely than forgiving others (Mauger et al, 1992; Thompson et al, 2005).

So we can see that self-forgiveness is an important topic of study for all practitioners devoted to mental health, which makes it all the more surprising the paucity of attention it has received so far in the field of the psychology of forgiveness. The complexity of the concept of self-forgiveness, in which the offender and the victim are the same person, can help us to understand the scarcity of studies addressing this issue and the reality of an intuitive clinical practice, with few intervention tools of a sound basis.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS AND SELF-FORGIVENESS

The first attempts to conceptually address self-forgiveness applied, directly and uncritically, the models and processes recommended for the forgiveness of others to this other type of forgiveness. Several authors have tended to discuss the nature of self-forgiveness in the context of the theory of interpersonal forgiveness, trying to find parallels between the two forms of forgiveness. Robert Enright is notable in this line. He was one of the pioneers in the study of forgiveness, and he introduced in 1996 what he called "the triad of forgiveness" (forgiveness of others, self-forgiveness, forgiveness of situations), describing each one of these three elements or types of forgiveness.

With respect to self-forgiveness, Enright noted the following similarities with interpersonal forgiveness: in both cases the person who forgives has the right to resentment and the right not to forgive, but they nevertheless choose to do so and overcome the resentment. Furthermore, with regards to seriously harmful behaviour, the subject has no obligation to be compassionate, generous or loving, however self-respect is essential. (On this point, Enright is referring to the positive and negative dimensions of forgiveness: the negative dimension is so called because the person who forgives is able to eliminate the negative feelings, behaviours and thoughts that accompany the reception of an offence, while the positive dimension refers to the appearance of positive feelings, behaviours or thoughts toward the offender; the negative dimension of forgiveness tends to be identified by the vast majority of the population as one of the effects of self-forgiveness, there being less agreement regarding the need for the presence of the positive dimension for the forgiveness to be considered complete). Enright also indicates the similarity that both types of forgiveness occur in response to an objective offence, i.e. they are not reactions to some vague feeling of discomfort, but rather to an event or multiple events that are considered offensive to oneself or to others. Hall and Fincham (2005), however, note that offences to oneself can occur without the need for an external behaviour: we can also feel damaged by inner thoughts, feelings or desires, such as wanting a sick relative to die or being sexually aroused by violence (Dillon, 2001). Finally, there is a false self-forgiveness, just as there is a false forgiveness of others: this is where the subject excuses his misconduct, is blind to the need

¹ *Translator's note:* From here onwards in the text, male and female pronouns will be used alternatively to avoid the use of 'he/she' and 'his/her'.



for change and absolves himself without any need for reparation or punishment. This same similarity is also noted by Hall and Fincham (2005), who distinguish between self-forgiveness and condoning or forgetting the offence itself. Forgiving oneself, they say, means making a conscious and deliberate effort to overcome the wrongdoing.

However, there are data that enable us to question these similarities. Correlational research indicates that self-forgiveness is weakly correlated with forgiveness of others (and in some studies no relationship was found), suggesting that it is necessary to focus on studying self-forgiveness in greater depth.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SELF-FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVENESS OF OTHERS

Hall and Fincham (2005) identified a number of differences at the theoretical level. For example, they noted that interpersonal forgiveness is unconditional; some authors call it "unilateral" or "intrapersonal". This means that it can be granted unilaterally, without the need for action on the part of the offender; it can be understood as a gift that the victim gives to the offender, the sole purpose of which is to relieve the victim's own discomfort caused by the offence received. However, self-forgiveness cannot be unconditional (the authors indicate): the subject has to establish the conditions that must be met in order to be able to forgive, which involves a resolution to change and to behave differently in the future (Enright, 1996). Moreover, one would think that the consequences of not forgiving oneself are more severe than those associated with a lack of interpersonal forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005). In the latter, negative thoughts, behaviours and feelings toward the offender may not be activated until the victim has contact with her. However, when a person has hurt someone else (or himself), the offender has continuous contact with himself and with his own behaviour, so it is impossible to escape from the situation (although avoidance could be directed toward the victim or toward the feelings, thoughts or situations associated with the offence; this type of avoidance would reduce the likelihood of the discomfort caused by the offence being activated and leading the person to forgiveness).

Enright (1996) noted an important theoretical point: two different concepts can be distinguished in the forgiveness of others, the forgiveness (which can only be carried out by the victim, unilaterally, being understood as a release of the discomfort caused by the lack of forgiveness and therefore not aimed at restoring any relationship) and the reconciliation (which does mean returning to a damaged relationship and which therefore necessarily requires the

participation of both parties, the victim and the offender). In interpersonal forgiveness, forgiveness may occur without reconciliation. However, Enright indicates that, in self-forgiveness, the forgiveness and the reconciliation are always united. Hall and Fincham (2005) also note this point, suggesting that self-forgiveness can be understood as the means for achieving reconciliation with oneself.

However, beyond the possible theoretical differences between the two concepts, there is also empirical evidence that sheds light on the relationship between the two types of forgiveness.

For example, both appear to have a curious relationship with narcissism, this being negatively related to forgiveness of others and positively related to self-forgiveness (Strelan, 2007; Tangney & Boone, 2004; Tangney et al, 2005). Maltby et al (2001) found that a low score on self-forgiveness is associated with an intrapunitive style, however, a low score on the forgiveness of others was related to an extrapunitive style. The relationship of both types of forgiveness with kindness also shows differences: it seems to have a moderate positive relationship with forgiveness of others and an inconsistent relationship with self-forgiveness, being found in some other studies (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002) and not others (Tangney & Boone, 2004; Tangney et al, 2005). Tangney and colleagues (Tangney & Boone, 2004; Tangney et al., 2005) found that dispositional self-forgiveness was positively correlated not only with narcissism, but also with other antisocial qualities such as aggression, and it was negatively related to prosocial qualities, such as empathy and self-control. Day and Maltby (2005) found that both types of forgiveness are negatively related to social isolation; however, when the effect of the relationship between the two types of forgiveness was controlled, it was found that self-forgiveness was the only predictor, and a very powerful one, in reducing social isolation. Finally, their relation to psychopathology has also been studied, it being found that difficulty in forgiving others is related to an increase in depression and in the severity of post-traumatic stress, while difficulty in forgiving oneself is associated mainly with increased anxiety (Wilson et al., 2008).

Because of all of these reasons, some authors question whether self-forgiveness can be considered as simply another kind of forgiveness, as Enright indicated in his forgiveness triad (1996). For example, Vitz and Meade (2011) reject the term "self-forgiveness" after analysing in great depth and detail the internal processes involved in self-forgiveness, concluding that forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness are based on very different psychological factors.



Several of the results presented not only illustrate the differences between the two types of forgiveness, but also lead us to question whether self-forgiveness is as positive or as desirable as we might think. In fact, several people have warned against what has been called "the dark side of self-forgiveness" (Wohl & Thompson, 2011).

THE DARK SIDE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

Self-forgiveness may not be good in itself, or it may be an indisputable objective of the therapeutic intervention. In fact, concerns about the risks of self-forgiveness partly reproduce some of the controversies on "the dark side" of forgiving others (Fisher & Exline, 2006).

Firstly, its strong, surprising and repeatedly found relationship with narcissism has led to the questioning of the processes through which a person does not fall into self-condemnation, remorse or lack of self-esteem after the improper conduct. In the study by Tangney et al. (2005), the profile of the "self-forgiver" was found to be a narcissistic, egocentric, overconfident person, lacking appropriate guilt or shame. Even if the subject did not initially present narcissistic characteristics, they ended up displaying them through the process of self-forgiveness. The authors suggest three possible explanations for their results: that the measures of self-forgiveness actually measured false self-forgiveness associated with narcissistic traits (which is what they assumed), or that the process of self-forgiveness may appeal particularly to narcissistic people, or that it may facilitate the development of such characteristics.

In addition, self-forgiveness can lead to separating the subject from others, because it reduces the motivation to be forgiven by the victim (Enright, 1996). Other authors believe that for this reason it can be considered disrespectful to the victim, it only being appropriate for the offender to forgive herself if she does so after being forgiven by the victim (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

Another possible negative characteristic is that it can "blind" us to our errors and make them more likely to occur without us experiencing guilt (Enright, 1996). Zechmeister and Romero (2002) found that people who forgave themselves tended to blame their victims, to see them as people who over-acted, or who sought to take offence, and they tended to justify their actions and disregard the anger of their victims. This is one of the most negative aspects of self-forgiveness: understanding it as a self-centred process and one that is disparaging to the victim; so one might think that not forgiving oneself may be more beneficial for interpersonal restoration. Hall and Fincham (2005) point out that without admitting implicitly or explicitly that our behaviour was incorrect and without

admitting responsibility or blame for such behaviour it is impossible for true self-forgiveness to occur, so these dangers would only affect false forgiveness.

In addition, self-forgiveness can reduce the motivation for behavioural change and personal growth. Squires, Sztainert, Gillen, Caouette and Wohl (2012) found a negative relationship between self-forgiveness and willingness to change in people suffering from gambling addiction. Matthew (2004, as cited in Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013) showed that self-forgiveness for having failed in an attempt to stop smoking increased the likelihood of trying again, but self-forgiveness for continuing to smoke decreased the motivation to attempt to quit in the first place. Wohl and Thompson (2011) suggest that self-forgiveness can be counterproductive in chronic maladaptive behaviours, as it increases the resistance to change and decreases the motivation to do so. Specifically, self-forgiveness increases the probability of remaining in the pre-contemplation stage rather than in that of contemplation (according to Prochaska and DiClemente's transtheoretical model of change) and it decreases the probability of being in the preparation stage. These authors note that self-forgiveness is not universally beneficial; it is not productive in facilitating behavioural change. However, self-forgiveness after stopping smoking may help prevent relapse, serving to reduce guilt and restore self-esteem.

As we can see, self-forgiveness does not seem to be a simple concept, and to be able to understand it requires close attention to its components and processes, avoiding the simple application of knowledge derived from the study of interpersonal forgiveness.

THE TIME COURSE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS

Most of the studies presented to date present problems that may cause more confusion in the field of self-forgiveness:

- ✓Self-forgiveness is identified as the mere absence of negative feelings or the appearance of positive feelings about an event that has offended someone. Forgiving oneself includes an emotional change, but it also leads in some way to reparative behaviour with the environment, the offensive situation and the offended person.
- ✓Cross-sectional designs and measures of self-forgiveness as an end-state are used, based on the lack of negative emotions and on the positive emotions towards oneself, measuring self-forgiveness in terms of self-esteem, compassion or lack of self-condemnation. Such measures ignore how that stage is reached.
- ✓They do not distinguish well between genuine self-for-



giveness and pseudo-forgiveness, dispositional forgiveness and specific forgiveness, forgiveness for past conducts and forgiveness for present conducts, forgiveness for having harmed others or for harming oneself, forgiveness for external and objective conduct or forgiveness for feelings, thoughts and innermost desires, etc.

Departing from the direction of the previous reviews, Woodyatt and Wenzel (2013) proposed to distinguish between self-forgiveness as an end-state and self-forgiveness as a process. Understanding self-forgiveness as an end-state can serve to narrow the concept and study it, according to these authors, but it does not necessarily respond to the way in which it actually occurs in the subject. In clinical practice, guided by research, it is especially important to have a clear model that explains clearly and precisely how self-forgiveness works, so it is especially important to determine the way that it is carried out, and not only the characteristics of the final state. For this reason, several authors have decided to design longitudinal studies and reconceptualise the measures in order to examine the nature of the process of self-forgiveness.

We will present our proposal below regarding the timeline of self-forgiveness, including the elements of the main theoretical models with the aim of giving the reader a complete, systematic and coherent view of the process of self-forgiveness.

When the subject commits an offence, he often experiences guilt and remorse, the main drivers of change and relational repair (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). Some forms of emotional distress may be adaptive after a transgression; it may function as a psychological reward, ensuring that the subject is still a good person despite what he has done, which he perceives as distinct from himself (Dillon, 2001). Showing remorse could be an expression of how much the offender values the relationship with the victim, or how much he values the victim herself. It also reduces the distance with others after the offence, and thus helps the offender to avoid punishment and/or facilitates forgiveness. Moreover, the discomfort may prevent the offender from further violating his values and causing the same harm again (Dillon, 2001).

Once the subject experiences this distress, there are three possible responses or ways of dealing with the fact of having committed an offence (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013):

1) Avoiding responsibility, blaming external factors and justifying her actions and thus avoiding any situation or person that reminds her of the offence. This first reaction

would be false forgiveness: the process by which the responsibility is externalised in order to neutralise the guilt (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013).

Blaming the victim means avoiding responsibility, so the offender need not forgive himself because he does not see himself as guilty. The offender defends that he has forgiven himself, but actually he denies any wrongdoing, decreasing his guilt by reducing his responsibility (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Hall & Fincham, 2005). The denial can include the denial of the deed itself, of its wrongfulness, of its importance or of the damage caused by it. In tests of self-forgiveness as an end-state, based on the lack of blame, on self-esteem or on remorse, this type of response is indistinguishable from genuine forgiveness.

It is a type of emotion-focused coping, as the offender seeks to minimise her emotional response to the offence by trying to change her feelings about the event that has occurred (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). One can try to escape the internal distress through various specific modes of avoidance (e.g. behaviour of avoiding the victim, or situations that remind the offender of her offence) which ultimately reflect what in acceptance and commitment therapy is called "experiential avoidance" (Wilson & Luciano, 2002), hindering the acceptance of "logical" distress and the use of this for the mobilisation of resources aimed at interpersonal restoration.

2) Excessive self-blaming or self-condemnation Rather than externalising the blame, it is internalised, with the subject experiencing high levels of shame, guilt and desire to punish himself. This leads to depressive tendencies and negative rumination, but not necessarily to taking responsibility or making efforts to change (Fisher & Exline, 2006). This self-condemnation response is associated with avoidance, egocentric focusing and negative interpersonal responses.

It is possible and necessary to distinguish between remorse (beneficial for feeling repentance and humility) and self-condemnation (Fisher & Exline, 2006). Within the emotional distress after the offence, several authors point out that the key to distinguishing between the two is to consider the different roles of guilt and shame. Forgiveness that comes from guilt and remorse would be genuine forgiveness, whereas shame would be the origin of self-condemnation and would be related to neuroticism.

Vitz and Meade (2011) define shame as the feeling of being unworthy or bad, not due to any particular action, but because a person feels or thinks she is inherently bad or unworthy. Forgiveness, the authors note, is not relevant for those who experience the burden of shame, at least



until this is overcome. Self-forgiveness is irrelevant to the subject when her negative feelings stem from a sense of shame; in order to accept forgiveness, first she needs to accept herself. These authors say that many of the benefits attributed to self-forgiveness are actually a result of self-acceptance, and the majority of the definitions of self-forgiveness found in the literature could be interpreted as descriptions of what would be better understood as self-acceptance.

For Leith and Baumeister (1998, as cited in Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013), shame is associated with poorer relational resolution after a conflict. These authors suggest that this is because the person experiencing shame is more focused on their own distress than on that of the victim; over time, increasingly self-centred self-punishment behaviours manifest, and this reduces the benefits of interpersonal restoration. In Ranganathan and Todorov (2010), shame and personal distress, rather than guilt and empathy towards others, were the key variables involved in inhibiting self-forgiveness, suggesting that individuals that are prone to shame are particularly vulnerable to intense negative affect.

3) Addressing the damage caused and carrying out compensatory restoration.

Only this way of dealing with the offence that has been committed would be true or genuine self-forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013), which comprises two dimensions: an external dimension, which is interpersonal, related to the community, the offensive situation and the victim; and an internal dimension, intrapersonal, related to self-esteem and self-concept. True self-forgiveness should lead to changes that produce both types of restoration. For these authors, only forgiveness that includes interpersonal and intrapersonal restoration is true self-forgiveness.

In the process of genuine self-forgiveness, the guilt and the value of the victim are recognised, the associated emotions are experienced, and attitudes and behaviours emerge that involve facing up to the offence, seeking to undo the damage, and, in the process, recovering the subject's image as good person (he forgives himself). In this sense it is a problem-focused coping strategy, which seeks to change the situation that created the negative feelings.

It seems that associated with this process are taking responsibility, repentance and experiencing the emotions that emerge from the offence and that lead to better behaviours of interpersonal restoration, including increased self-control and harmony with the community (Fisher & Exline 2006; Wohl et al, 2010). Admitting

responsibility, accepting "private events" (Wilson & Luciano, 2002), expressing guilt, shame and regret, the offender is aware of her aggression and reaffirms the values that have been violated by the offence (Wenzel et al., 2012), she asserts her moral identity with respect to the victim, the community and herself. For all of these reasons, it is expected that self-forgiveness is related to both interpersonal and intrapersonal restoration, although it may be that these are only long-term benefits.

We finish this section offering Cornish and Wade's (2015) definition of self-forgiveness, which covers these contents of genuine forgiveness and is more complete than the definition we gave at the beginning of this article: it is a process in which the person (a) accepts **responsibility** for having harmed another person; (b) expresses **remorse** while reducing shame; (c) is committed to **restoration** through reparative behaviour, tries to change the behaviour patterns that led to the offence and re-commits to his values; and (d) achieves a renewed self-respect, self-compassion and **self-acceptance**, obtaining moral growth from the whole process.

We feel it is of particular interest to finish by pointing out the extraordinary similarity between these four components of self-forgiveness and the four dimensions of forgiveness-seeking behaviour. The behaviours that have been identified as most important in interpersonal forgiveness, for restoring confidence in the relationship, giving back the victim's security and promoting commitment to the relationship once again, are as follows (Pansera, 2009): (a) **recognition of the damage caused and repentance**, which includes accepting the damage that has been done, accepting responsibility and showing remorse and guilt; (b) **demonstrating understanding of the pain and suffering caused and validation or acceptance of that pain**; (c) **reparative actions**, and (d) **showing a change in behaviour** and sometimes a change in the relational rules that are related to the offence so that it does not happen again.

Most of the research on forgiveness has focused on the person that does the forgiving, the victim, and has ignored the perspective of the offender. In self-forgiveness the same person is both the offender (the defendant) and the bestower of forgiveness (the judge). As we have seen, when self-forgiveness first began to be studied, the subject was viewed as someone who has done wrong, as someone who must forgive herself; however, the development of research on this kind of forgiveness has led us to consider that, in our opinion, the best perspective for understanding self-forgiveness is to consider the subject as someone that should receive forgiveness, not as someone who should grant it.



CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Self-forgiveness is a new, open and exciting field of study, absolutely relevant to the professional work of the psychologist in all fields. In this article we have reviewed the main issues on which the research on self-forgiveness focuses, indicating the areas where more clarity is needed, and we have attempted to provide some structure and coherence to the results that the research has been uncovering. We would like to conclude our article with a series of reflections and questions to guide future research on self-forgiveness.

Firstly, we started with post-offence emotional distress as if it were an experience common to all subjects; however, an interesting line of research opens if we ask ourselves whether the experience is really that common or what differences there are between some subjects and others with respect to the post-offence emotions. For example, are they related to personality? Or to irrational ideas or learned cognitive schemata? Or to characteristics of the specific situation and offence? How can the greater tendency of some subjects to experience shame be explained? What factors influence these tendencies in turning them into avoidance behaviour or into interpersonal restoration?

Secondly, we could understand false forgiveness and self-condemnation as prior states to genuine forgiveness, then asking ourselves which interventions would facilitate the progress from these states to ultimate forgiveness? Furthermore, both this ultimate forgiveness and the other two responses could be conceived as a matter of degrees; it would be possible to be at a stage somewhere between the three. For example, if interpersonal restoration is not achieved is it possible to achieve genuine forgiveness? Is it really necessary? What is the relationship between intrapersonal and interpersonal restoration?

Finally, we must remember that the coinciding of the four components of self-forgiveness with the four dimensions of seeking forgiveness leads us to propose a change of perspective in the study of self-forgiveness, to focus on it as an issue related to the offender and the pursuit of forgiveness, which is a perspective that seems interesting and promising.

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