Journal of Family Psychology

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This study investigates self-forgiveness for real hurts committed against the partner in a romantic relationship ($N = 168$ couples). Using a dyadic perspective, we evaluated whether offender self-forgiveness, conceived as a bidimensional construct distinct from self-excusing, was uniquely related to both own and partner relationship satisfaction. For both males and females, offending partners were more satisfied with their romantic relationship to the extent that they had more positive and less negative sentiment and thoughts toward themselves, whereas victimized partners were more satisfied with the relationship when the offending partner had less negative sentiment and thoughts (but not more positive ones) toward himself/herself. The implications of these findings for understanding self-forgiveness and its pro-relationship effects in romantic couples are discussed.

Keywords: self-forgiveness, relationship satisfaction, couples, APIM, responsibility

There has been a dramatic increase in research on forgiveness in recent years. However, as Fehr, Gelfand, and Nag's (2010) comprehensive review shows, this research focuses almost exclusively on the perspective of the victim of a transgression. Forgiveness has been shown to yield salutary outcomes for victims; it is associated with greater psychological well-being, reduced depressive symptoms, distress, anxiety and enhanced life satisfaction, self-esteem, and positive mood (e.g., Coyle & Enright, 1997; Reed & Enright, 2006; Rye et al., 2001). But some time ago, Stillwell and Baumeister (1997) documented fundamental differences between victims and perpetrators in regard to forgiveness: Victims tend to overlook details that facilitate forgiving and embellish their memories with details that make forgiving more difficult, whereas transgressors tend to embellish details, such as extenuating circumstances, that facilitate forgiving. Although these biases are smaller in satisfying relationships than in less satisfying relationships (Kearns & Fincham, 2005), such differences suggest it would be unwise to extrapolate from research on interpersonal forgiveness to self-forgiveness and point to the need for research on self-forgiveness. The present study attempts to address this need and, in doing so, confronts the thorny issue of assessing self-forgiveness.

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What Is Self-Forgiveness?

When a person realizes that he or she has committed an offense, his or her thoughts, feelings, motivations, or behaviors directed toward the self become more negative (e.g., he or she feels resentment toward the self, condemns himself/herself harshly, or feels self-disrespect for what he or she has done). Self-forgiveness is the psychological process whereby an offender, acknowledging responsibility for the transgression committed, decreases self-resentment and is more benevolent toward the self (e.g., shows greater self-compassion, restores self-respect and a positive image of oneself; Bauer et al., 1992; Holmgren, 1998; Hall & Fincham, 2005). Consistent with this view, Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1996, p. 115) define self-forgiveness as a "willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself."

In contrast to interpersonal forgiveness, which does not imply reconciliation with the offender, self-forgiveness entails reconciliation with the self. As Enright (1996) points out, "Certainly one may mistrust oneself in a particular area, but one does not remain alienated from the self" (p. 116), and philosophers, in emphasizing the importance of restoring self-respect in self-forgiveness, necessarily imply reconciliation (Dillon, 2001; Holmgren, 1998). Thus, according to Thompson et al. (2005), self-forgiveness entails a reframing—a new understanding of oneself and of the offense committed that helps restore a positive self-image without condoning or excusing the offense. In short, self-forgiveness is the psychological process whereby an offender acknowledges wrongdoing following a transgression he or she committed, and without condoning or excusing it, overcomes negative sentiment toward the self and is reconciled to the self.

Accepting Responsibility for the Offense

A critical feature of this definition concerns acknowledging the wrong committed and taking responsibility for it, which is also emphasized in philosophical analyses of self-forgiveness (see Dillon, 2001; Holmgren, 1998; Snow, 1993). Accepting responsibility for the wrongdoing has been hypothesized and shown to be one key element distinguishing genuine self-forgiveness from pseudo self-forgiveness (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Hall & Fincham, 2005). If offenders do not recognize their transgression and feel accountable for it, they are unlikely to consider themselves in need of forgiveness. Accepting responsibility opens the offender to self-condemnation and feeling negative emotions, like guilt and regret, as well as consideration and respect of the victim's suffering. In this sense, self-forgiveness may be considered a reconnection to a positive self-image (Bauer et al., 1992) rather than a narcissistic process of self-excusing. As Fisher and Exline (2006) show, when self-forgiveness scales do not consider acceptance of responsibility as a prerequisite for measuring it, self-forgiveness is unrelated to self-condemnation, is associated with less humility, and is more similar to self-excusing than to what theorists would call genuine self-forgiveness.

In distinguishing between self-forgiveness and pseudo self-forgiveness, this analysis helps shed light on prior apparently contradictory findings. On the one hand, self-forgiveness has been found to be positively related to antisocial qualities (Tangney, Boone, & Dearing, 2005) and to the tendency to be more blaming toward the victim (Strelan, 2007; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). On the other hand, self-forgiveness also has been associated with positive outcomes. Mauger et al. (1992) and Maltby, Macaskill, and Day (2001) show that self-forgiveness is related to mental health, in the sense that people who forgive themselves are less depressed, introverted, anxious, and distrusted, whereas Hodgson and Wertheim (2007) underline that self-forgiveness is related to mental flexibility and emotional stability. In the absence of direct examination of acknowledged responsibility for wrongdoing, the above sets of findings may reflect pseudo and true forgiveness, respectively.

In light of these observations, it can legitimately be asked whether genuine self-forgiveness benefits not only the offender but also the relationship between the offender and the victim. We consider this question next.

Forgiveness in Close Relationships

A substantial literature is emerging on interpersonal forgiveness in close relationships (for reviews, see Fincham, 2010; Fincham & Beach, in press; Fincham, Hall, & Beach, 2006). Numerous studies show that forgiveness by the victim of a partner transgression is related to improved intimacy, commitment, relationship satisfaction, and less ongoing conflict (Fincham & Beach, 2007; Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007; Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2005, 2010; Tsang, McCullough, & Fincham, 2006). Considering these positive relationship outcomes, as well as improved individual health-related outcomes (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003), interpersonal forgiveness has been consequently viewed as a coping strategy that serves as a relationship maintenance mechanism (Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Fin-

kel, 2005) and provides an opportunity for growth in both the individual and the couple (Strelan & Covic, 2006).

In light of the positive relationship outcomes attributed to interpersonal forgiveness, it is not surprising that data relevant to the impact of self-forgiveness in relationships is beginning to emerge. Thompson and colleagues (2005) showed that a tendency to forgive the self is positively associated with relationship satisfaction. Wohl, DeShea, and Wahkinney (2008) found that self-forgiveness serves as a mediator in the relationship between self-blame and depressive affect in people suffering from an unwanted end to a romantic relationship.

We seek to build on these early attempts to understand self-forgiveness in close relationships and begin by noting the parallel between interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Just as interpersonal forgiveness may be considered the victim's relationship-oriented coping strategy with the potential fracture to the relationship represented by the transgression (Strelan & Covic, 2006), so also might self-forgiveness be considered the offender's relationship-oriented coping strategy to maintain the bond. Given that, as previously noted, self-forgiveness is associated with personal well-being (Maltby, Macaskill, & Day, 2001; Mauger et al., 1992), which, in turn, is positively related, both concurrently and over time, to relationship quality (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007), self-forgiveness can be reasonably assumed to covary with relationship satisfaction as well. In fact, as long as offenders do not forgive themselves, they are more likely to dwell on the wrongdoing and be troubled by intrusive feelings and thoughts of it. These ruminative tendencies are expected to have negative effects not only on the offenders' well-being but also on their motivation to apologize and to seek forgiveness and conciliation toward the victimized partner (vanOyen-Witvliet, Hinman, Exline, & Brandt, 2011), whose relational satisfaction presumably further decreases. This prediction is consistent with interdependence theory and research (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012) that posits that affective and cognitive reactions to personal life events are related to partner reactions.

Before addressing this question empirically, we consider two self-forgiveness correlates that could account for any association between self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction: the perceived severity of the offense and guilt feelings.

Self-Forgiveness, Perceived Offense Severity, and Guilt

Similar to interpersonal forgiveness (e.g., Fincham, Jackson, & Beach, 2005), self-forgiveness has been shown to be facilitated by lower perceived severity of the offense (Hall & Fincham, 2008). Although negative consequences are an inherent part of a transgression, some offenses are obviously more severe and, consequently, more difficult to forgive. There is also evidence that a decrease in the offender's perception of the severity of the transgression is often related to a decrease in guilt, which has been found to be inversely related to self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2008). As Enright et al. (1996) pointed out, real self-forgiveness originates from guilt feelings deriving from the acknowledgment of the hurt committed. Nonetheless, as long as the offender moves toward self-forgiveness, by overcoming negative sentiment and being benevolent toward the self, guilt decreases while acknowledged responsibility remains (Strelan, 2007).

Present Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze self-forgiveness in a couple context. In particular, our aim is to examine whether each partner's self-forgiveness for a real hurt committed against the other can be regarded as a pro-relationship process that is positively related both to the offender's and the victim's relationship satisfaction. Based on the analysis offered earlier, we hypothesized that relationship satisfaction reported by both the transgressor and the victimized partner should be greater when the transgressor is more forgiving toward himself/herself.

In contrast to prior research on self-forgiveness, which tends to overlook the distinction between genuine self-forgiveness and self-excusing, a form of pseudo self-forgiveness that originates from denying responsibility, we examined self-forgiveness only in individuals accepting responsibility for the offense committed.

In addition to recognizing the need to study self-forgiveness, rather than self-excusing, we also recognized the potential bidimensional nature of self-forgiveness. Whether explicit or implicit, in conceptual analyses of self-forgiveness is both the diminution of negative sentiment and beliefs toward the self *and* the growth of positive sentiment and beliefs toward the self. Given that positive sentiment and beliefs toward the self cannot be inferred from the absence of negative ones, and vice versa, an attempt is made to capture both dimensions of self-forgiveness: one negative, assessing negative sentiment and beliefs toward the self, which denote the lack of self-forgiveness (or unforgiveness of self), and one positive, measuring positive sentiment and beliefs toward the self, which indicates the presence of self-forgiveness.

As the perceived severity of transgressions committed and guilt feelings for them can be argued to be inversely related to both self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction, we examine whether the offender's perception of transgression severity and his or her guilt feelings account for the associations between self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction.

Finally, we also explore whether there are gender differences in the link between self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Participants were 168 couples living in Northern Italy who were married or who had been cohabiting for more than 3 years. Couples were recruited by inviting psychology students to ask acquaintances who had been married or dating for more than 3 years to participate, together with their romantic partners, in a study on close relationships. The average length of relationships was 11.5 years ($SD = 8.3$). Participants ranged in age from 25 to 55 years, and the mean ages of men and women were 38.5 ($SD = 6.4$) and 36 ($SD = 7$) years, respectively. Mirroring national trends, females had a higher educational level than their male partners (60% of females and 48% of males had a degree). No individual was rewarded or paid for his or her participation in this study.

Procedure

The primary investigator met with each couple, explained the nature of the study, and then obtained informed consent. As part of a larger study, the investigator asked each member of the couple to report a wrongdoing committed against the partner for which he or she felt responsible and by which the victimized partner remembered being hurt. For half of the couples, the man was the first to report the offense, and for the remaining couples, the woman was. Thus, each couple selected two transgressions that occurred in their relationship. In one case, the man was the offender and the woman the victim, whereas in the other case, the man was the victim and the woman was the offender. Couples carried out this assignment in the presence of the investigator without much difficulty.

After identifying these offenses, each partner was invited to briefly describe in writing the offense he or she perpetrated and to indicate the time since it occurred on a 6-point scale (1 = *less than three months ago*; 2 = *three to six months ago*; 3 = *seven to eleven months ago*; 4 = *one to two years ago*; 5 = *three to five years ago*; 6 = *more than five years ago*). Then he or she filled out the measures described in the next section.

Measures

Responsibility.   We measured perceived responsibility for the offense committed against the partner with a single item ("To what extent do you feel responsible for the wrongdoing?") rated on a 7-point Likert- type scale (1 = *not responsible at all*, 7 = *responsible at all*).

Transgression severity.   Perceived severity of the transgression perpetrated was assessed with the item "How serious was your wrongdoing?" rated on a 7-point Likert- type scale (1 = *not serious at all*, 7 = *very serious*).

Guilt.   Guilt for the offense committed against the partner was assessed with the item "To what extent do you feel guilty for the wrongdoing?" rated on a 7-point Likert- type scale (1 = *not guilty at all*, 7 = *guilty at all*).

Relationship satisfaction.   Couple satisfaction was measured with the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). This six-item inventory assesses marital satisfaction with broadly worded, global items (e.g., "We have a good marriage"). In order to assess relationship satisfaction in unmarried couples, rather than in married ones, the word "marriage" in the scale was replaced by the phrase "couple relationship." Respondents showed their degree of agreement with each of five items on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very strong disagreement*) to 7 (*very strong agreement*), and with one item on a 10-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*very strong disagreement*) to 10 (*very strong agreement*). Because the data were negatively skewed, the following transformation, recommended by Norton (1983), was used: $QMI^* = .001(\Sigma z_i + v)3$, where QMI^* = transformed QMI, z_i = standardized score, and v = variance across intervals obtained by stratifying the distribution of the QMI into 5% intervals. Coefficient alpha was .92 for men and .93 for woman.

Self-forgiveness.   A measure of self-forgiveness for the offense committed was developed that built on the Heartland Self-Forgiveness Scale (HFSS; Thompson et al., 2005) in the following manner. First, the six items from the HFSS were adapted to assess offender self-forgiveness for a specific offense (, e.g., "I don't stop criticizing myself for negative things I've felt, thought, said, or done" was changed to "I don't stop criticizing myself for the negative thing I've felt, thought, said, or done"). The HFSS com-

prises two different dimensions—a positive one and a negative one. The first captures benevolence toward the self (e.g., "With time I am understanding of myself for the mistake I've made"), whereas the second captures the presence of negative sentiment and thoughts toward the self caused by the wrongdoing ("I hold a grudge against myself for the negative thing I've done"). Six further items, three for each dimension, were created to capture other important self-forgiveness features not considered in the HFSS, like self-growth or self compassion (see Bauer et al., 1992; Dillon, 2001; Enright et al., 1996). For example, "Learning a lesson from what I've done helped me to overcome the event" (positive dimension) or "I'm not able to feel compassion toward myself because I think of the suffering I caused" (negative dimension).

Data Analysis Plan

In the forgiveness literature, few studies take into account dependency in couple data (Fincham, 2010). One way to do so is to use the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) proposed by Kenny (1996). This data-analytic approach takes into account the interdependence between the two partners by simultaneously estimating the effect that a respondent's action has on his or her own outcome score (actor effect) and on the partner's outcome score (partner effect). This study used the APIM, which allowed us to determine whether offender self-forgiveness for a specific hurt had an effect not only on his or her relationship satisfaction but also on his or her partner's (the victim's) satisfaction (see Figure 1).

An important consideration in the APIM is whether dyad members are distinguishable (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). At the conceptual level, partners in heterosexual relationships are distinguishable on the basis of sex. However, conceptually distinguishable partners may not be empirically distinguishable. The Omnibus Test of Distinguishability (I-SAT) is used to determine distinguishability at the empirical level. This test consists of placing a number of equality constraints on the model. Specifically, (a) means for all the variables of interest are set to be equal between males and females, (b) variances for all the variables are set to be equal between males and females, (c) intrapersonal covariances (actor effects: a, $a1$) for males and females are constrained to be equal, and (d) interpersonal covariances (partner effects: p, $p1$) for males and females are constrained to be equal. If this highly constrained model cannot be rejected, it means that partners are not distinguishable for these variables and that the model has to be estimated using these constrains.

Results

In order to distinguish pseudo self-forgiveness (in which there is little or no perceived responsibility for the transgression) from authentic forgiveness, only data from subjects who felt at least moderately responsible for the offense (scoring 4 or higher on the 7-point responsibility item) were analyzed. Application of this criterion resulted in a final sample of 150 couples whose average length of relationship was 12 years ($SD = 9.2$) and mean age was 38 ($SD = 6.7$) and 36 ($SD = 6.7$) years, for men and women, respectively.

Men and women reported that they had perpetrated a variety of interpersonal offenses. Some examples include the following: "I didn't help my wife with our daughters, even though I knew it was important to her," " I told him he was a failure," "I made a fool of her in front of his friends," "I said offensive words to her mother," and "I behaved as I didn't trust him." Most offenses occurred within the last 6 months (50% and 59.5%, for men and women, respectively) and they were, on average, similar across partners for their mean level of perceived severity ($M = 4.15$ and 4.02 for men and women, respectively, $t[149] = 0.772$, ns). However, on average, men felt more responsible and more guilty than women (responsibility: $M = 5.23$ and 4.98, $t[149] = 2.094$, $p = .038$; guilt: $M = 4.06$ and 3.66, $t[149] = 2.179$, $p = .031$).

Before examining APIM models, we first examined the psychometric properties of the self-forgiveness items.

Preliminary Analysis: Measurement of Self-Forgiveness

Do the self-forgiveness items reflect two different dimensions and is there measurement equivalence across gender? First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on male data and extracted factors with principal axis factoring and an oblimin rotation (Russell, 2002). Examination of the scree plot (eigenvalues larger than 1.0) and residuals between observed and reproduced correlations that were smaller than | .10 | determined the number of factors extracted (McDonald, 1985). Two factors emerged. Seven items with factor loadings less than | .30 | or with cross-loadings on both factors were removed. Because the solution indicated that factors were not correlated, we performed the same EFA using varimax rotation. For men, two orthogonal factors, one positive and one negative, emerged: four positive items, assessing the presence of self-benevolence, compassion, and growth, explained 23% of the variance, and seven negative items, measuring the lack of self-benevolence and compassion, as well as the pres-
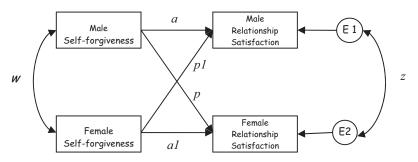

Figure 1.   Actor–partner interdependence model.

ence of self-resentment and a negative self-view, explained 43% of the variance.

Using the data from females, we then assessed the validity of the two-factor solution for the 11 retained items by means of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The two-factor model, in which the four positive items were allowed to load on one factor, and the seven negative items on another related factor, provided a good fit to the data, S-Bχ^2(43) = 61.53, p = .033, R-CFI = .96, R-RMSEA = .056, 90% CI [.017, .086]. Next the orthogonal solution was compared with an oblique one. The CFA with two oblique factors showed an equally good fit, S-Bχ^2(44) = 63.50, p = .029. R-CFI = .96, R-RMSEA = .056, 90% CI [.017, .086]. Because the χ^2 difference test was not significant ($\Delta\chi^2$ = 3.14), the orthogonal solution was preferred because it was more parsimonious.

Finally, we tested measurement invariance across gender by estimating male and female factor solutions simultaneously in a single model and placing constraints on corresponding loadings. Specifically, factor loadings on each dimension were set to be equal for the two members of the couple; additionally, latent factors, as well as errors across the same indicators, were allowed to correlate across men and women, reflecting nonindependence across the two members of the couple. The model fit was adequate, S-Bχ^2(205) = 285.6819, p = .000, R-CFI = .93, R-RMSEA = .054, 90% CI [.038, .068], indicating that the positive dimension, named Forgiveness of Self, and the negative dimension, named Unforgiveness of Self, have the same meaning for both men and women. The internal consistency reliability was good for both Forgiveness of Self (αs = .78 for husbands and wives) and Unforgiveness of Self (αs = .90 for husbands and .86 for wives).[1] Consequently, responses to items loading on each factor were averaged to form indexes of Forgiveness of Self and Unforgiveness of Self.

Descriptive statistics for self-forgiveness dimensions, relationship quality, transgression severity, and guilt are reported in Table 1.

Actor–Partner Interdependence Models

Forgiveness of self. The I-SAT test showed that partners were not distinguishable empirically for Forgiveness of Self, S-Bχ^2(6) = 7.622, p = .267. However, it is important to note that mean level differences are theoretically and empirically distinct from differences in variance/covariance patterns. Because we were interested in the variance/covariance structure in the model, we released the mean constraints and reestimated the model (see Ackerman, Donnellan, & Kashy, 2011). The model with means freely estimated also fit the data, S-Bχ^2(4) = 5.882, p = .208. As a result, we proceeded to our analysis with indistinguishable dyads.

In the APIM, significant actor effects (.15) were found both for men and women (see Figure 2). These indicate that the more the offender was benevolent toward himself/herself, the more he or she was satisfied with the couple relationship. No significant partner effect emerged.

Unforgiveness of self. The I-SAT test showed that partners were not distinguishable empirically for Unforgiveness of Self, S-Bχ^2(6) = 4.753, p = .576. Again the model fit the data with the

mean constraints released, S-Bχ^2(4) = 4.427, p = .351. Hence, we again conducted the APIM with indistinguishable dyads.

The results of the APIM for Unforgiveness of Self are shown in Figure 3. Both actor and partner effects were significant. As was the case with Forgiveness of Self, the offender's Unforgiveness of Self predicted his or her relationship satisfaction ($-.25$). Thus, the more the offender felt negative emotions against the self, the less relationship satisfaction he or she reported. Significant partner effects ($-.14$) also emerged. To the extent that the offender was not able to stop negative feelings toward the self, the relationship satisfaction of the victimized partner was lower.

Transgression severity and guilt. To rule out the possibility that the actor and partner effects were a byproduct of transgression severity and guilt, APIMs for forgiveness and unforgiveness of self were reestimated while controlling for reported transgression severity and guilt. Specifically, transgression severity and guilt rated by the two offending partners were entered as covariates of both partners' self-forgiveness and as predictors of their relationship satisfaction; in addition, transgression severity and guilt were allowed to covary across partners.

When controlling for transgression severity and guilt, all the effects previously found remained significant. In particular, actor effects were .19 in the APIM for the Forgiveness of Self, S-Bχ^2(4) = 5.457, p = .244, and in the APIM for Unforgiveness of Self, actor and partner effects were $-.26$ and $-.12$, respectively, S-Bχ^2(4) = 2.530, p = .639. Therefore the association between self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction could not be attributed to the offender's perceived offense severity or guilt.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to investigate self-forgiveness for real hurts occurring in romantic couples and to understand its role at a dyadic level. Specifically, by conceiving of self-forgiveness as a multidimensional construct distinct from pseudo forgiveness, we evaluated whether offender self-forgiveness for a specific hurt committed against the partner was uniquely related not only to his or her own relationship satisfaction but also to the victimized partner's satisfaction.

We found that in about 10% of couples, one of the two partners did not accept much responsibility for the wrongdoing he or she perpetrated against the partner, suggesting that his or her expression of self-forgiveness could represent more pseudo than genuine self-forgiveness. In our earlier analysis, we argued that accepting responsibility for the wrongdoing is one of the prerequisites for self-forgiveness and that it is essential to distinguish self-forgiveness from self-excusing (Fisher & Exline, 2006; Hall & Fincham, 2005). Thus, even though more studies are needed to empirically differentiate self-forgiveness from related constructs (e.g., self-justification and self-condoning), the present study helps document correlates of authentic self-forgiveness.

After removing participants who did not acknowledge responsibility for the transgression, we found that men and women reported interpersonal transgressions that were similar in their variety and mean level of perceived severity; however, on average, men felt more responsible and more guilty for them than women. These last findings are in line with research showing that even

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[1] The scale is available from the corresponding author upon request.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Variables in APIM Analyses (N = 150)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. M Forgiveness of self	—									
2. M Unforgiveness of self	.27***	—								
3. M Relationship satisfaction	.24**	−.26**	—							
4. M Transgression severity	.30***	.40***	.00	—						
5. M Guilt	.36***	.47***	−.05	.78***	—					
6. F Forgiveness of self	.37***	−.06	.07	.01	−.03	—				
7. F Unforgiveness of self	−.03	.30***	−.29***	.01	.00	.14	—			
8. F Relationship satisfaction	.12	−.17*	.52***	.06	.01	.10	−.34***	—		
9. F Transgression severity	.07	.18*	−.19*	.31***	.31***	.23**	.33***	−.23**	—	
10. F Guilt	.11	.24**	−.17*	.30***	.31***	.14	.25**	−.23**	.79***	—
Mean	4.43	2.38	36.18	4.15	4.06	4.59	2.35	36.45	4.02	3.66
SD	1.31	1.20	13.54	1.74	1.81	1.10	1.08	13.97	1.58	1.64

Note. APIM = Actor–Partner Interdependence Model; F = female; M = male.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

though women typically report that they are more likely to feel guilty on hypothetical scenario-based measures, men are in fact more disposed to experience it (Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2005). This probably happens because men are socialized to have a more independent self-construal (Cross & Madson, 1997), and are less able to anticipate others' emotions and evaluate the impact of their behaviors on others; therefore, they are more apt to find themselves as offenders in situations that actually induce greater responsibility and guilt.

We then examined whether the data were consistent with the hypothesized bidimensional nature of self-forgiveness. Our offense specific self-forgiveness items yielded two distinct dimensions: a positive dimension reflective of benevolence and compassion toward the self, as well as self-growth (forgiveness of self), and a negative dimension that captured lack of benevolence and compassion toward the self as well as the presence of self-resentment and a negative self-view (unforgiveness of self). The two dimensions had the same meaning for both men and women, and in both sexes, the dimensions were moderately or weakly related to each other. This finding supports the hypothesis that, similar to interpersonal forgiveness (Gordon, Hughes, Tomcik, Dixon, & Litzinger, 2009; Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2009), self-forgiveness implies both an increase of positive beliefs and feelings toward the self as well as a reduction of negative ones (Thompson et al., 2005). Importantly, the reduction of resentful and critical reactions toward the self does not imply an increase in

benevolent and sympathetic sentiments, nor does the presence of positive thoughts and feelings toward the self exclude the offender from ambivalently experiencing also negative ones. In fact, somewhat unexpectedly, we found a positive association between the two self-forgiveness dimensions rather than a negative one. This might be explained by considering some features of the self-forgiveness dimensions. Namely, forgiveness of self includes a sense of self-growth that derives from both the acknowledgment of the offense perpetrated and the effort to change oneself in order to avoid repeating similar wrongdoings. Consequently, self-growth implies recognition of past negative aspects of the self, which is common to unforgiveness of self as well.

Self-forgiveness dimensions were related to within and across partner relationship satisfaction equally in both men and women. In particular, consistent with Thompson and colleagues' (2005) findings, both dimensions of men's and women's self-forgiveness were positively related to their own self-reported relationship satisfaction. Thus, for offending partners, experiencing less negative and more positive sentiment and thoughts toward themselves was associated with greater satisfaction with their romantic relationship.

However, only unforgiveness of self was related to partner-reported relationship satisfaction: less negative (but not more positive) thoughts and feelings toward themselves among offending partners were associated with greater relationship satisfaction in their victimized partners. Thus, our data suggest that a person is
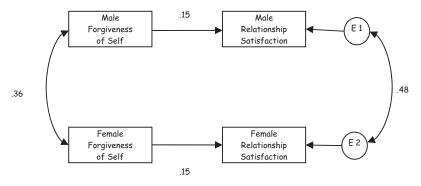

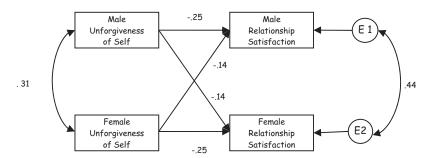*Figure 2.* APIM for forgiveness of self and relationship satisfaction.

Figure 3. APIM for unforgiveness of self and relationship satisfaction.

likely to improve both partner and own relationship satisfaction when he or she stops criticizing himself/herself and feeling re-morseful for offenses perpetrated against the partner, but not when he or she is more benevolent or compassionate toward the self and believes he or she has grown due to the offense committed. This probably happens because, for the victim, it may be particularly dissatisfying to live with a partner who is prone to negative thoughts and feelings, like remorse, rumination, guilt, distrust, and depression, fostered by a lack of self-forgiveness (Hill & Alle-mand, 2010; Mauger et al., 1992). As recently demonstrated, offenders who ruminate about the transgression are less motivated to apologize and to ask for forgiveness and conciliation with the victim (vanOyen-Witvliet et al., 2011). In addition, from an evo-lutionary perspective, being able to recognize and control negative emotions and/or situations is more adaptive than being able to recognize and control positive ones (e.g., Rozin & Royzman, 2001; see also Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). For this reason, identifying in the offender a positive intraindividual change, like self-growth, may be exceptionally difficult for the victimized partner, whose relationship satisfaction is therefore unrelated to such a change. Finally, the relatively greater importance of unforgiveness of self is consistent with a substantial body of literature showing that "bad is stronger than good" (Baumeister et al., 2001, p. 362), both generally and spe-cifically in marital relationships (Fincham & Beach, 2010), in that negative events tend to influence emotion, cognition, and behavior more strongly than positive ones (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). In a similar vein, interpersonal forgiveness research shows that the negative dimension of forgiveness is a better predictor of both self-reported and partner-reported dyadic satisfaction than the pos-itive dimension (Gordon et al., 2009).

Overall, the present study advances prior research by providing evidence that, besides being related to personal well-being (e.g., Maltby et al., 2001), self-forgiveness is positively related to rela-tionship satisfaction, even after controlling for the offender's guilt feelings and perception of transgression severity. Interdependence theory and research (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012) supports the fact that affective and cognitive reactions to personal life events are related to the partner's feelings or beliefs used to cope with the event. Consistent with this literature, our findings suggest that forgiving oneself for offenses against the partner may be beneficial not only intrapersonally, for the self, but also interpersonally, for the partner and the relationship; it helps to overcome an event that has the potential to result in negative consequences for both partners. Thus, given the interdependent nature of close relation-

ships, self-forgiveness of offenses perpetrated in them is likely to be a means of caring for both the self and the other, or even better, a means of taking care of the other while taking care of the self.

Limitations and Conclusions

In interpreting the findings reported here, it is helpful to keep in mind some methodological limitations that are likely to affect them. First, the use of single-item measures to assess offense severity, responsibility, and guilt is less than optimal. In addition, the procedure used to elicit transgressions, which required each subject to report the offense perpetrated against the partner in his or her presence, might have influenced types of offenses gener-ated. In fact, participants recalled offenses in relation to which their mean level of forgiveness of self was somewhat high. None-theless, offenses recalled in the present study seem comparable in their average severity to those that similar samples of Italian couples reported to have suffered from the partner (see Paleari et al., 2009).

Second, it must be acknowledged that the direction of effects in the relation between self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction remains speculative in the absence of longitudinal or experimental data. Our findings do not rule out the possibility of an opposite causal direction in the paths linking self-forgiveness and relational satisfaction: As long as offenders live in happy and satisfying relationships, they may be facilitated in forgiving themselves (e.g., by finding in the victim an understanding and forgiving partner). Indeed, as evidence on interpersonal marital forgiveness suggests (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 2007; Paleari et al., 2005), self-forgiveness and relational satisfaction are likely to reciprocally influence each other.

Finally, the present study does not rule out the possibility of potential third variables that might influence both self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction (e.g., forgiveness granted by the vic-tim or offender's traits like a depressive personality style), nor does it identify potential variables that might mediate the associ-ation between self-forgiveness and relationship satisfaction (e.g., repair strategies, ruminative thoughts, personal well-being) or moderate it (e.g., offense severity).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the current study advances research on self-forgiveness within close relationships in several ways. First, it offers a new bidimensional conceptualization of offense-specific self-forgiveness and a means of assessing this construct. Second, the study makes important contributions to our understanding of self-forgiveness as a coping strategy through

which the offender deals with the suffering caused by the wrong-doing and may promote the well-being of the close relationship. Finally, from an applied standpoint, our findings point to the need for clinicians to focus on self-forgiveness as a promising way for addressing both personal and relational distress resulting from hurts committed in close relationships such as marriage.

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