PERSONALITY AND SELF-FORGIVENESS: THE ROLES OF SHAME, GUILT, EMPATHY AND CONCILIATORY BEHAVIOR

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The focus of this paper is on the somewhat neglected component of the forgiveness construct, self-forgiveness, and its relationship to shame, guilt, empathy, and conciliatory behavior. A section of a theoretical model of self-forgiveness, proposed by Hall and Fincham (2005), was compared with a new model, to ascertain the role these emotional and behavioral factors played in influencing self-forgiveness. Participants were 91 first-year undergraduate psychology students and a community sample of 59 who completed self-report measures of each variable. Structural equation modeling revealed that the Hall and Fincham model did not provide an adequate fit to the empirical data until the covariance between shame and guilt was incorporated into the model. Unlike their findings, shame-proneness and personal distress empathy, rather than guilt and other-oriented empathy, emerged as the key personality traits involved in inhibiting self-forgiveness. A new model emphasizing these findings is presented and implications for future research are discussed.

Forgiveness as a psychological construct has become a topic of increasing interest to researchers in recent years. Yet despite emphasis on the multidimensional nature of forgiveness, and the importance of both forgiving oneself as well as others (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1996), the construct of self-forgiveness has still attracted comparatively little empirical

attention. Most research programs have tended to discuss the nature of self-forgiveness only within the context of interpersonal forgiveness theory (Tangney, Boone, & Dearing, 2005), attempting to draw parallels between forgiveness of self and forgiveness of others (for a full review see Hall & Fincham, 2005). Correlational research however, indicates that self-forgiveness is only weakly correlated, and in some studies unrelated to forgiveness of others (e.g., Mauger et al., 1992; Thompson et al., 2005), suggesting a need for more focused study on the nature of self-forgiveness.

According to theorists, self-forgiveness involves an objective fault or wrongdoing on the part of the offender and an acknowledgment of responsibility for the hurtful act, as opposed to simply condoning, excusing, or forgetting a transgression (Hall & Fincham, 2005). A conscious overcoming of self-resentment, and the working through of negative feelings such as guilt, remorse, and shame triggered by the offense are also considered necessary for the offender to be able to reach some sort of internal acceptance of themselves, and to experience moral growth (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Enright et al., 1996; Holmgren, 1998).

In general, the limited extant self-forgiveness studies suggest that self-forgiveness is a beneficial attribute, related to psychological well-being. A failure to forgive oneself has been found to be "intropunitive" and predictive of low self-esteem (Mauger et al., 1992), higher levels of neuroticism (Ross, Kendall, Matters, Wrobel, & Rye, 2004) and guilt (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), while a self-forgiving disposition appears positively associated with prosocial orientations such as friendliness (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002), a lack of hostility (Ross et al., 2004) and a trusting attitude (Mauger et al., 1992). Moreover, Mauger and colleagues (1992) using a clinical population, and a more recent study by Thompson and colleagues (2005) using a large undergraduate sample, found that self-forgiveness was more strongly related to aspects of mental health than forgiveness of others, with low trait self-forgiveness predictive of higher levels of depression and anxiety.

A recent model of self-forgiveness proposed by Hall and Fincham (2005), proposes a number of social-cognitive, emotional, and offense-related factors that might constitute the motivation to forgive oneself following an interpersonal transgression (see Figure 1). Although Hall and Fincham's model in its entirety is focused upon situational self-forgiveness, (how self-forgiveness may vary from offense to offense), a section of their model is particularly interesting
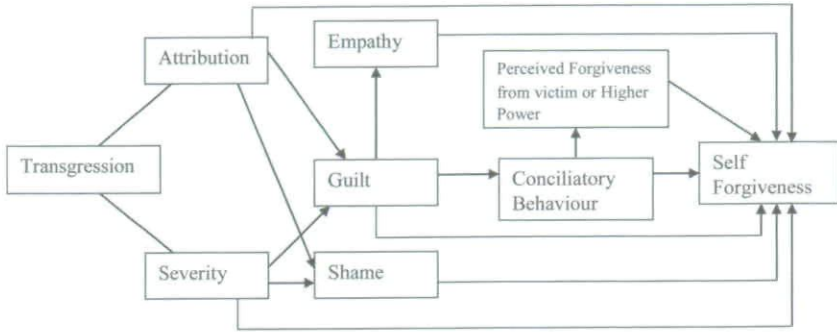
FIGURE 1. Hall and Fincham's proposed model of self-forgiveness (2005).

in light of the above research which suggests that people's scores on measures of *dispositional* self-forgiveness tend to be related to their scores on measures of mental health and well-being. Dispositional self-forgiveness refers to an individual's general propensity to forgive the self for failures and transgressions that cause harm to others (Hall & Fincham, 2005). For example, high levels of shame and guilt have been strongly linked to psychopathology (Abe, 2004), and excessive levels of these emotions would be expected to compound the difficulties associated with a lack of self-forgiveness.

The section of Hall and Fincham's model most relevant to a dispositional self-forgiveness focus is shown in Figure 2. This model proposes that the two main emotional determinants of self-forgiveness are the self-conscious emotions of shame and guilt, and a review of the extensive shame and guilt literature suggests an intimate link between the resolution of these self-conscious emotions and self-forgiveness (Tangney et al., 2005). Guilt involves some combination of tension, remorse, anxiety, and regret resulting from the self's negative evaluation of a specific behavior, and in line with the findings of previous research (e.g., Zechmeister & Romero, 2002; Strelan, 2006) is proposed as a barrier to self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005). That is, individuals who are prone to experience guilt in response to their wrongdoing are more likely to punish themselves by not engaging in self-forgiveness, and thus not allowing themselves to get away with causing a hurt (Strelan, 2006).

However, guilt is said to have an adaptive effect on relationships because the remorse and regret experienced during guilt helps to motivate behaviors orientated toward reparative action. These conciliatory behaviors such as apologizing, making restitution, or seek-
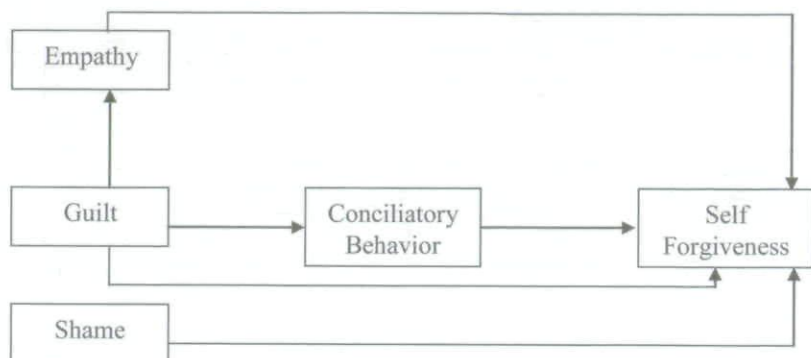
FIGURE 2. The section of Hall and Fincham's proposed model (2005) most relevant to a dispositional self-forgiveness focus.

ing forgiveness (Ausubel, 1955; Tangney, 1995; Wicker, Payne, & Morgan, 1983) may serve the function of easing an offender's guilt and the negative affect they associate with their culpability, presumably because one is now doing the right thing (Hall & Fincham, 2005). Thus the model proposes that conciliatory behavior will act as a mediator between guilt and self-forgiveness. That is, high guilt-prone individuals are more likely to display higher levels of conciliatory behavior following a transgression, which in turn promotes self-forgiveness by absolving an offender's guilt. Although engaging in conciliatory behavior is depicted as an offense-specific variable by Hall and Fincham (2005), it is possible that some individuals may display such behavior to a greater extent than others, so that it may be considered an individual difference variable together with proneness to shame and guilt.

Guilt may however also influence self-forgiveness through its association with empathy. Empathy is a multidimensional construct consisting of a set of separate but related constructs (Davis, 1994), and several independent studies assessing shame-free guilt (guilt with shame partialled out) have consistently reported that guilt is positively related to the cognitive aspects of empathy (Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Leith & Baumeister, 1998). These include perspective-taking, defined as the ability to place oneself in another's shoes and comprehend his or her point of view, and empathic concern for another, that is caring about the welfare of others and becoming upset over their misfortunes (Davis, 1983, 1994). Existing research suggests that the other–oriented empathic concern fostered by guilt may actually work to prevent self-forgiveness from occurring

(Zechmeister & Romero, 2002; Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002). For example, Zechmeister and Romero (2002) found that compared to individuals who had forgiven themselves for an offense, those who had not reached self-forgiveness were more likely to report guilt, regret and other focused empathy. Empathy is thus also expected to act as a mediator in the process of self-forgiveness. That is, high guilt proneness is expected to be positively related to high levels of cognitive empathy which in turn will inhibit self-forgiveness, because the more one feels one's victim's pain, the harder it is to forgive oneself for inflicting the pain.

In contrast to guilt, shame involves an excessive and critical focus on the self, rather than the offensive behavior and is more likely to promote the self-destructive intentions associated with a failure to forgive the self (Tangney, 1991). While guilt may potentially make way for self-forgiveness by motivating reparative behaviors, proneness to shame has been positively associated with a tendency to externalize cause or blame, and to self-reported anger, arousal, and hostility (Tangney, 1990; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992). Such factors are likely to work to limit the shame-prone individual's efforts to deal effectively with their offense and the consequences for their relationship (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Lewis, 1987), and the model thus proposes a negative association between shame and self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

To date, this theoretical model has not been tested, but structural equation modeling (SEM) makes it possible to test whether the model actually fits empirical data, and thus wether the predicted relationship between the hypothesized variables exist (Byrne, 2001).

Although the variables defined in Hall and Fincham's model appear to play a key role in influencing self-forgiveness, due to the relative novelty of research into self-forgiveness, it would be of value to investigate other potential variables which may influence the process of self-forgiveness and that the existing model appears to be lacking. Interestingly, although there is both theoretical and empirical evidence to suggest empathy is linked to both guilt and shame (e.g., Hoffman, 1982, 1983; Tangney, 1991), Hall and Fincham's model overlooks the evidence and proposes only a direct link between shame and self-forgiveness. In doing so the model fails to acknowledge the potential way shame and empathy may interact to further prevent self-forgiveness. Previous research has already documented a link between shame-proneness and the propensity for self-orientated personal distress reactions (Tangney, 1991), but no
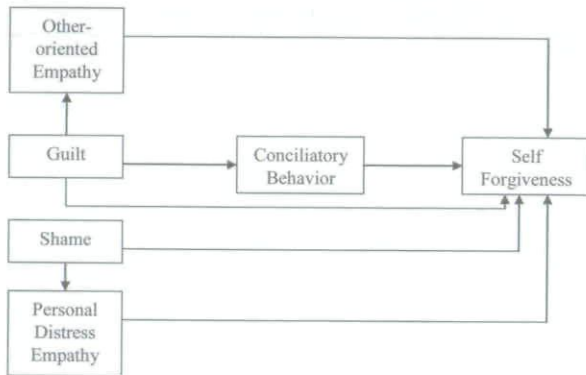
FIGURE 3. Our proposed model of self-forgiveness.

study could be found that tested the mediating role of personal dis-
tress empathy in self-forgiveness. Personal distress empathy, part of
the emotional component of empathy involves a negative reaction
such as anxiety or discomfort on perceiving cues related to anoth-
er's distress (Batson, 1991). Although personal distress originates
in empathic response to another's suffering, the emerging preoc-
cupation with one's own distress is likely to preclude the shame-
prone individual from doing what might otherwise benefit their
victim and strengthen the relationship (Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller,
& Miller, 1989). As Zechmeister and Romero (2002) found nearly
one third of offenders who did not forgive themselves in their study
wrote about their own distress in response to their empathy for their
victims suffering, it is expected that high shame-proneness will be
positively related to personal distress empathy, which will mediate
the ability to self-forgive. That is, the personal distress reaction will
make the process of releasing resentment towards oneself difficult,
and so inhibit self-forgiveness in shame-prone individuals.

Thus the present study aimed to examine the personality traits
and behavioral factors that influence the ability to forgive the self
by testing the section of Hall and Fincham's model shown in Figure
2 against a new model which differentiates between the different
components of empathy and allows for an additional pathway from
shame to personal distress empathy (Figure 3). In light of the scar-
city of research on the mechanisms by which self-forgiveness can be
achieved, it is also of interest to determine which of the proposed

models explain more of the variance of these variables in influencing self-forgiveness.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The sample comprized 91 undergraduate psychology students (71 women, 20 men) from Macquarie University who participated voluntarily in exchange for course credit. The students ranged in age from 17 to 47 years old ($M = 21.09$ years). Approximately 55% were Caucasian, 18.7% were South East Asian, 8.8% were Indian, and 17.6 % had some other ethnic background. Sixty-four (70.3%) participants identified with a religion and the religious sample was predominantly Christian (70.3%). As an adequate sample size is required in SEM in order to have enough power to achieve precise parameter estimates (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996), a community sample of 59 participants was also recruited utilizing friends or family members of the participants and researcher, and via posters placed around the university campus. All participants in the community sample went in the draw to win movie tickets. The community sample was also predominantly young ($M = 21.07$) and female (62.9%); 33.9% were South East Asian, 50.8% were Indian, 10.2% were Caucasian, and 5.1% identified themselves as Other. Of the community sample, 82.3% identified with a religion, and a large majority were Christian (45.1%) or Hindu (41.2%).

MATERIALS

Self-Forgiving Attitude. The participant's self-forgiving attitude was assessed using The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson et al., 2005). The Heartland Forgiveness Scale consists of 18 items, with three six-item subscales assessing forgiveness of self, others, and situations. Items are measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = Almost always false of me; 7 = Almost always true of me). For the purpose of this study only the Heartland Forgiveness Self subscale (HFSS) was used. The wording of the items were generally in the direction of higher scores meaning more self-forgiveness, (e.g., With time I am understanding of myself for mistakes I've made and Learning from bad things I've done helps me get over them), and three of these items were reverse-scored so that a higher total

score would indicate greater self-forgiveness. Cronbach's alpha was acceptable at α = .805.

Dispositional Shame and Guilt. The Test of Self Conscious Affect-3 *(TOSCA-3;* Tangney, Dearing, Wagner, & Gramzow, 2000*)* was used to measure the participants' dispositional shame and guilt. The TOSCA-3 consists of 16 brief scenarios (11 negative and 5 positive) and participants are asked their likelihood of responding in ways that reflect the cognitive, behavioral and affective aspects of guilt and shame using 5-point Likert scales (1 = Not likely; 5 = Very likely). A sample scenario for the TOSCA is "You are out with a group of friends and you make fun of a friend who is not there." A sample shame response is: "You would feel small. . .like a rat." A sample guilt response is: "You would apologize and talk about the person's good traits." Similarly, the guilt-relevant response to the scenario, "While playing around, you throw a ball and it hits your friend in the face" is "You would apologize and make sure your friend feels better," whereas the shame-relevant response is "You would feel inadequate that you can't even throw a ball." In this study, the alphas for the shame and guilt subscales were .826 and .694, respectively.

Empathy. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index *(IRI;* Davis, 1983) is a 28-item self-report questionnaire that yields two cognitive and two emotionally-oriented empathy subscales. Participants rate each empathy-related statement on a scale from 1 (doesn't describe me well) to 5 (describes me very well). As the Fantasy subscale measures the tendency to imaginatively transpose oneself into fictional situations, it was not of relevance, and so for the purpose of this study only three of the 7-item subscales were used. The Perspective-Taking subscale assesses the ability to "step outside of the self" and take on another's perspective in real-life situations. For example "I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the other guy's point of view." The Empathic Concern subscale assesses the extent to which respondents experience other-oriented feelings of compassion and concern. For example "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them." The Personal Distress subscale assesses the degree to which respondents experience self-oriented discomfort or fear when faced with another's distress. For example "When I see someone who badly needs help in an emergency, I go to pieces." Coefficient alphas in the present sample for the empathy scale was .744, and the relevant subscales were .765

(Perspective-Taking), .688 (Empathic Concern) and .778 (Personal Distress).

Conciliatory Behavior. The Conciliatory Behavior Scale (*CBS*), developed for this study, is a 7-item questionnaire that measures the reparative strategies or behaviors that an offender may engage in following a transgression, including behaviors that appear motivated by guilt, and likely to occur when attempting to seek forgiveness from others (see Appendix A). For example "When I have hurt or offended someone I will usually apologize" or "I will always try to make amends with a person whom I have offended." Participants rate each statement on a scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). The items are summed so that a higher score indicates more conciliatory behavior, with item 5 being reversed scored. A factor analysis of the seven-items revealed a clear and single factor structure emerging and the reliability of the scale was acceptable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .757.

Religiosity. Although religion is not a strong variable of interest in the present study, there is a strong emphasis placed upon self-forgiveness by many religions (Leach & Lark, 2004). Consequently three questions were included as measures of religiosity in order to control for possible confounds in the study. These included: do you identify with a religion (yes/no); if yes which religion; and, how strongly religious are you (1 = Not religious; 5 = Very religious).

PROCEDURE

Each participant completed a questionnaire booklet in either group or individual sessions. The packets took approximately 30 minutes and were handed back to the experimenter once completed.

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations of the various scales are presented in Table 1. The assumption of normality was met for all variables.

TABLE 1. Mean Scale Scores and Mean Scores for Men and Women for Each Measure

Measure	Range	Overall (n = 150)	Men (n = 42)	Women (n = 108)
HFSS Subscale	6 to 42	28.27 (6.29)	29.81 (6.28)	27.61 (6.22)
Shame Subscale	16 to 80	47.47 (10.00)	43.07 (9.89)	49.19 (9.56)
Guilt Subscale	16 to 80	63.82 (6.86)	60.57 (7.33)	65.08 (6.30)
Perspective Taking Subscale	0 to 28	17.97 (4.60)	17.26 (4.40)	18.25 (4.66)
Empathic Concern Subscale	0 to 28	21.33 (3.90)	18.88 (4.30)	22.29 (3.29)
Personal Distress Subscale	0 to 28	12.91 (4.98)	9.48 (3.99)	14.25 (4.69)
Empathy Scale	0 to 84	52.14 (8.71)	45.86 (7.72)	54.58 (7.83)
CB (7-item) Scale	7 to 35	30.30 (3.58)	29.17 (3.55)	30.74 (3.51)

Note. Values are scale Means, Standard Deviations are in parentheses.

RELIGIOSITY EFFECTS

None of the religion-related measures correlated significantly with either the HFSS or any of the other measures in the study. There was no evidence that those who were more religious were also more self-forgiving, $t(148) = -.308$, $p > .05$. To test the possibility that for some religions or cultural backgrounds self-forgiveness may be determined by guilt, while for others shame is more crucial, one-way analysis of covariances were conducted to test for such possible interactions. With alpha set at .05 the interaction between guilt and ethnicity $F(3, 150) = .813$, $p = .489$, shame and ethnicity $F(3, 150) = .460$, $p = .711$, guilt and religion $F(2, 115) = 1.218$, $p = .300$, and shame and religion $F(2, 115) = 2.446$, $p = .091$ were not found to be significant.

GENDER EFFECTS

To test for gender effects, independent group t-tests were used to compare mean scores for men and women on each of the measures (assessed at a Type 1 error rate of $\alpha = .05$). No significant differences between men ($M = 29.62$, $SD = 6.3$) and women ($M = 27.63$, $SD = 6.2$) on self-forgiveness were found, $t[148] = -1.75$, $p = .057$.

However significant gender differences were found for the measures of shame $t(148) = 3.48$, $p = .001$, guilt $t(148) = 3.78$, $p < .0001$, empathic concern $t(148) = 5.21$, $p < .0001$, personal distress $t(148) = 5.82$, $p < .0001$, empathy $t(148) = 6.15$, $p < .0001$, and conciliatory be-

havior $t(148) = 2.46$, $p = .02$. Female participants scored higher than male participants on all of these measures. No significant correlations were found between age and forgiveness of self ($r = .003$).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF SELF-FORGIVENESS MODELS

Structural equation modeling was used to determine which of the two hypothesized path models best fit the empirical data. The section of Hall and Fincham's model (2005) and the model of self-forgiveness proposed here were tested and compared based on the covariance matrices using the AMOS 5 program (Arbuckle, 2003). Utilizing the established procedures for structural equation modeling, the overall fit of the hypothesized models were evaluated based on the global chi-square statistic (χ^2) and several other indices (Byrne, 2001), including the comparative fit index (CFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). All depicted relationships in the models were tested at a significance level of .05. To indicate a good fit, values of χ^2 were considered if they were nonsignificant at the 0.05 level (Hu & Bentler, 1999). CFI, NFI, and TLI values that are greater than 0.95 generally indicate good model-to-data fit (Byrne, 2001). Browne and Cudeck (1993) note that RMSEA values of less than .05 indicate very close model-to-data fit and values between .06 and .08 indicate adequate model-to-data fit.

The results of the hypothesized path model for the section of Hall and Fincham's (2005) model is presented in Figure 4. While the model accounted for 28% of the variance in self-forgiveness, the fit statistics did not indicate good model-to-data fit with a significant χ^2 (4, $N = 150$) = 40.35, $p<.000$, (CFI = .70; NFI = .69; TLI = .24; RMSEA = .25, 90% confidence interval, CI = .00, .18).

Although Hall and Fincham (2005) make no reference to the covariance shared between shame and guilt in their paper, consistent with previous studies using the TOSCA-3 measure (e.g., Tangney et al., 1992) a significant association was found between shame and guilt, $r(150) = -.451$, $p < .0005$. It was thus decided to incorporate this covariance into the model to see if it would improve the fit. The results of the hypothesized path model for the section of Hall and Fincham's (2005) model with this covariance added are presented in Figure 5. This model accounted for 26% of the variance in self-forgiveness and the goodness-of-fit indices yielded good model to data fit with a nonsignificant χ^2 (3, $N = 150$) = 6.48, $p = .09$; (CFI =
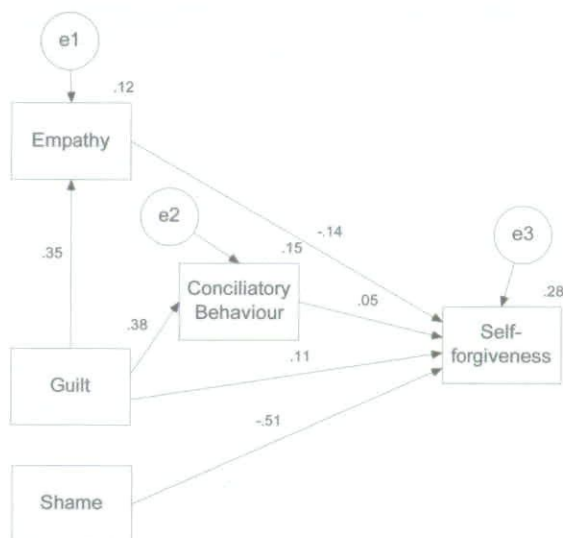
FIGURE 4. Section of Hall and Fincham's Model: Results of the hypoth-
esized path model. All reported regression weights are standardized. e1
through e3 refer to error terms. All the path coefficients are significant
at the p ≤ .05, except guilt which was unrelated to self-forgiveness di-
rectly or indirectly through conciliatory behaviour or empathy.

.97; NFI = .95; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .09, 90% confidence interval, CI
= .00, .18). An examination of the standardized regression weights
of the paths among the variables indicated that several paths were
significant. As predicted, the path between shame-proneness and
self-forgiveness was significant and negative (CR = -6.53, $p < .001$)
suggesting that high shame-proneness was associated with less self-
forgiveness, while the paths between guilt and conciliatory behav-
ior (CR = 5.06, $p < .001$) and guilt and empathy (CR = 4.50, $p < .001$)
were significant and positive, indicating that participants higher on
trait guilt were also more likely to engage in conciliatory behavior
following an interpersonal transgression and experience empathy.
The departure from the posited theoretical model was that guilt-
proneness was not directly linked to self-forgiveness (CR = 1.27, $p =$
.21) providing no evidence that high dispositional guilt is predictive
of a difficulty in forgiving the self. The prediction that conciliatory
behavior would act as a mediator between guilt and self-forgiveness
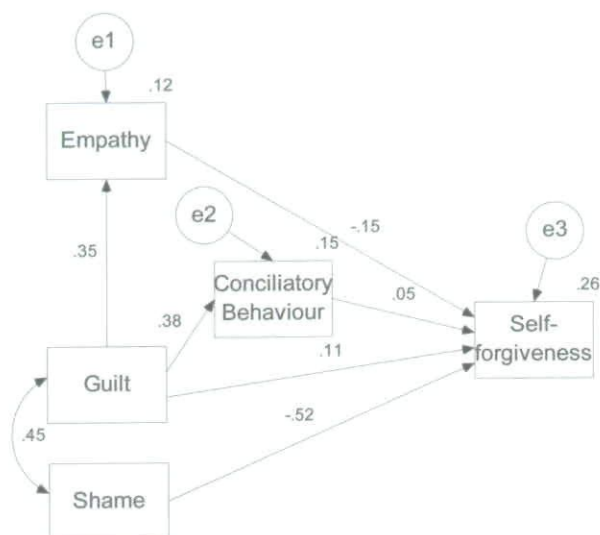was also not supported as the path between conciliatory behavior

FIGURE 5. Section of Hall and Fincham's Model: Results of the hypothesized path model with covariance added. All reported regression weights are standardized. e1 through e3 refer to error terms. All the path coefficients are significant at the p ≤ .05, except guilt which was unrelated to self-forgiveness directly or indirectly through conciliatory behavior or empathy.

and self-forgiveness was not significant (CR = .70, p = .48). The path between empathy and self-forgiveness was just at significance (CR = -1.96, p = .05). Due to the barely significant pathway between empathy and self-forgiveness, the prediction that empathy would mediate the relationship between guilt and self-forgiveness was not supported. In addition, the covariance between shame-proneness and guilt-proneness was significant at the p ≤ .0005 level. A multiple group analysis confirmed that the Hall and Fincham Model fit each subset of the sample (first year students and community sample) equally, χ^2 (6, N = 150) = 6.33, p≥ .05.

Due to the relative strength of the direct path between shame and self-forgiveness in the model, an alternate model was also tested which involved the removal of shame from Hall and Fincham's model. Although this causal structure provided a good fit to the empirical data with a nonsignificant χ^2 (1, N = 150) = 2.21, p = .137 (CFI = .98; NFI = .96; TLI = .85; RMSEA = .09, 90% confidence inter-
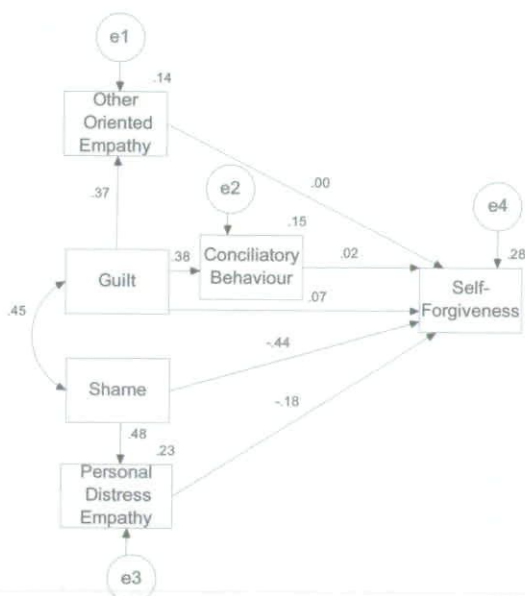
FIGURE 6. The model proposed here: Results of the hypothesized path model. All reported regression weights are standardized. e1 through e4 refer to error terms. All the path coefficients are significant at the p≤ .05, except the direct paths from guilt, other-oriented empathy and conciliatory behavior to self-forgiveness.

val, CI = .00, .23), the model only accounted for 8% of the variance in self-forgiveness, suggesting shame was accounting for more than half of the variance in self-forgiveness for this model.

The results of the hypothesized path model for the model of self-forgiveness proposed in this study is presented in Figure 6. While the model accounted for 28% of the variance in self-forgiveness, the fit statistics did not indicate good model-to-data fit with a significant χ^2 (6, N = 150) = 18.02, p = .006 (CFI = .93; NFI = .90; TLI = .82; RMSEA = .12, 90% confidence interval, CI = .06, .18). The nonsignificant path between other-oriented empathy and self-forgiveness suggested a more parsimonious model could be achieved by removing this path.

Finally, the results of the model proposed here with other-oriented empathy omitted is presented in Figure 7. The removal of other-oriented empathy from the current model improved the fit indices, and yielded an excellent model-to-data fit, χ^2 (3, N = 150) = 3.09, p = .379 (CFI = 1; NFI = .98; TLI = 1; RMSEA = 0, 90% confidence interval, CI = .00, .14). The model accounted for 28% of the variance in
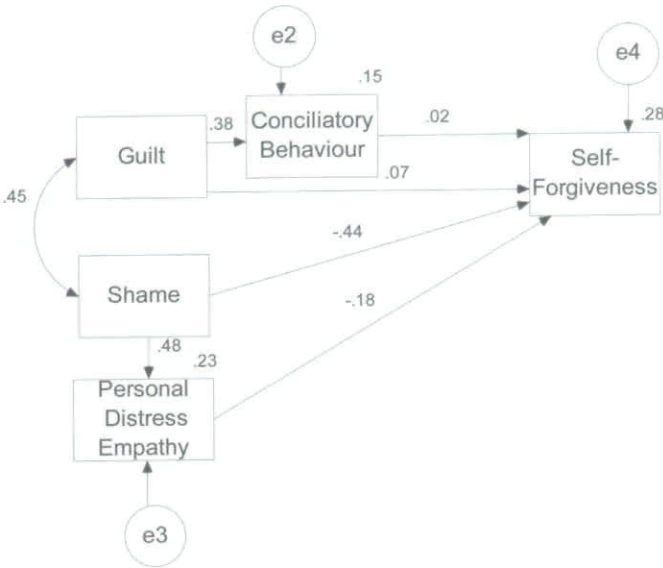
FIGURE 7. The current model: Results of the hypothesized path model. All reported regression weights are standardized. e1 through e3 refer to error terms. All the path coefficients are significant at the p≤ .05, except the direct paths from guilt and conciliatory behavior to self-forgiveness.

the self-forgiveness construct. It is clear that other-oriented empathy failed to add any unique explanatory power to the model. When the current model was tested, all but two of the posited paths of influence to self-forgiveness were significant (at the p ≤ .05 level). As in the previous models, the paths from guilt and conciliatory behavior to self-forgiveness were nonsignificant. As predicted however, shame-proneness was significantly linked to personal distress empathy (CR = 6.67, $p < .001$) and personal distress empathy showed a significant negative relationship with self-forgiveness (CR = -2.23, $p < .05$). That is, people higher on shame were also more likely to be higher on personal distress empathy and low on self-forgiveness. Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure was used to explore the extent to which personal distress empathy mediated the relationship between shame and self-forgiveness. This was carried out through AMOS using a method that generates bootstrapped significance tests for indirect effects (Arbuckle, 2003). Using this method the indirect effect of shame on self-forgiveness was found to be significant ($B = -.09$, $p < .05$) and the association between shame and self-forgiveness was found to be partially mediated by personal distress

Personal Distress
Empathy

B=.48   B=-.18
p< .001   p=.02

Shame   Self-
              B=-.44, p< .001   Forgiveness

Unadjusted effect: B= -.53, p=.01
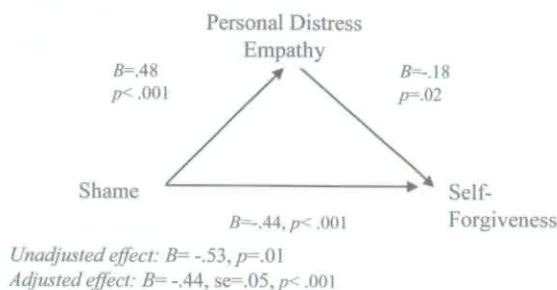*Adjusted effect: B= -.44, se=.05, p< .001*

FIGURE 8. Mediation effect of personal distress empathy on shame and self-forgiveness (N=150).

empathy as the adjusted effect of shame-proneness' influence to self-forgiveness was reduced, but still significant (see Figure 8).

A multiple group analysis confirmed that this model fitted both university and community sub-samples equally, with a nonsignificant χ^2 (6, N = 150) = 4.66, p ≥ .05.

FINAL MODEL

Although Hall and Fincham's model with covariance (Figure 5) and the current model of self-forgiveness proposed here (Figure 7) both fit the empirical data, the models were not nested and thus it was not possible to directly compare them in order to determine which model provided a significantly better fit. Instead, the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) was examined. The AIC is used to compare nonnested models (models with different variables), in which values closer to zero indicate a more parsimonious model (i.e., a model with less parameters and which fits the data equally well is favored over a more complex model; Schumacker & Lomax, 1996). The original section of Hall and Fincham's model (without the covariance) had AIC = 64.35 while the revized model with covariance added was AIC = 30.48. The current model of self-forgiveness allowing for personal distress empathy was AIC = 27.09. Although the AIC value for the current model is only marginally better than the revised Hall and Fincham model, the current model was clearly

more parsimonious and had better fit indices than the original section of Hall and Fincham's model, which failed to fit the empirical data. Overall the data suggested that the final model needed to allow for both the covariance between shame and guilt, and the pathway from shame to personal distress empathy, neither of which were accounted for in the original section of Hall and Fincham's model. Thus the model that emerged as the better fit to the data was the current model proposed here and presented in Figure 7.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, two competing theoretical models were tested to determine which model best fit actual empirical data on dispositional self-forgiveness, and to examine the role that emotional and behavioral determinants played in influencing the tendency to forgive oneself following an interpersonal transgression. Contrary to expectations, shame, and personal distress, rather than guilt and other-oriented empathy, emerged as the key variables involved in inhibiting self-forgiveness. Interestingly, the original section of Hall and Fincham's theoretical model failed to fit the empirical data. It would appear that the weaknesses in this model were its failure to allow for the covariance between shame and guilt, to differentiate between the different components of empathy, and to incorporate the path between shame and the affective component of empathy, personal distress. Personal distress empathy has been linked to shame in previous research (Tangney, 1991), yet this is the first study to test and find evidence for its mediating effect in influencing self-forgiveness. The current model proposed here (Figure 7) which incorporated these associations thus provided a better fit to the empirical data.

Although a number of the pathways in the model were not found to be significant, an important finding in the present study was that in support of previous research (Tangney et al., 2005), high-shame proneness predicted a difficulty in forgiving the self following an interpersonal transgression. The alternative model tested with the removal of shame indicated that shame uniquely explained 18% of the variance in the self-forgiveness construct. Considering the multitude of other factors both present in the model and external to it that may play a role in influencing self-forgiveness, the explanatory power of shame is impressive. The finding of the mediating effect of personal distress empathy in inhibiting self-forgiveness is also of

significance as it suggests that in interpersonal transgression situ-
ations, shame-prone individuals are doubly vulnerable to intense
negative affect. They are likely to experience the resonant pain of
personal distress as well as the pain of shame for being the kind
of person who would inflict such harm (Tangney, 1991). Such fac-
tors would clearly make it difficult for the individual to renounce
self-resentment, or develop the self-acceptance necessary for self-
forgiveness to take place.

The link between shame, personal distress empathy and self-
forgiveness also has important implications for the theoretical ori-
entation of Hall and Fincham's model, as the original model ap-
peared to emphasize the role of guilt in inhibiting self-forgiveness.
While clinical theory and case studies also make frequent reference
to maladaptive guilt being linked to the development of psycho-
logical symptoms, and previous research has also suggested a nega-
tive relationship between guilt and self-forgiveness (Zechmeister &
Romero, 2002; Strelan, 2006), this pathway was not found to be sig-
nificant in the model. Although nonsignificant it is interesting that
the direction of the relationship was positive rather than negative.
Such a finding may best be explained by the use of different mea-
sures in the current study compared to previous ones. The present
study used the scenario-based TOSCA-3 measure, and it has been
argued that because the measure uses reparative behaviors in its
conceptualization of guilt, it is particularly likely to tap into more
adaptive reactions to daily transgressions. In contrast, the study by
Strelan (2006) which found a negative correlation between guilt and
self-forgiveness used the Harder Personal Feelings Questionnaire
(PFQ2; Harder & Zalma, 1990), which is a checklist measure of guilt,
and checklist measures have been argued to assess more chronic
and thus maladaptive levels of guilt (e.g., Ferguson & Crowley,
1997; Quiles & Bybee, 1997). However it must be noted that the
correlation found by Strelan was relatively low ($r = -.26$) and thus
future research, using a variety of checklist and scenario measures
while controlling for the covariance between shame and guilt, is
needed to investigate this relationship more carefully before firm
conclusions about the role of guilt in influencing self-forgiveness
can be drawn.

There were also a number of limitations to this study. Although
explaining 28% of the variance in self-forgiveness was deemed ac-

ceptable given the exploratory nature of the study, the present study tested only a section of Hall and Fincham's (2005) original model. In particular, this study used a single cross-sectional correlational design and focused on the emotional and behavioral determinants of dispositional self-forgiveness because of their previous link to health correlates. It would be profitable for future research to test the entire model with a situational self-forgiveness focus by asking participants to recall a past offense, measuring the same variables and the additional social–cognitive factors that may facilitate self-forgiveness following a specific transgression (e.g., offense severity and attributions), in order to see if such a model is able to account for a greater proportion of variance in the self-forgiveness construct. Such research will also be useful in determining whether the relationships observed among the pathways in the present study were a function of the change of focus of the model from situational to dispositional self-forgiveness. In particular, it may be that conciliatory behavior is actually mediated by features of specific hurtful incidents such as offense severity and attributions. Finally, there was a large gender imbalance within the present study with almost two thirds of the sample consisting of women. As women also tend to score higher on measures of shame, guilt, and empathy, it is essential that both models be tested with an equal number of male and female participants in order to confirm or refute the present results, and identify in what way the gender imbalance could have been influencing the results.

Thus in summary, the current model tested here provided a better fit to the empirical data than the original section of the theoretical model proposed by Hall and Fincham (2005). The study has provided substantial evidence for the role of shame, and the mediating influence of personal distress empathy in inhibiting self-forgiveness. While the present study has provided a solid start to understanding the mechanisms of dispositional self-forgiveness, it is essential that future research investigates the model proposed here and its findings further, in order to confirm the theoretical importance of shame and personal distress in influencing self-forgiveness.

APPENDIX A

Conciliatory Behavior Scale

Item 1. "When I have hurt or offended someone I will usually apologize"

Item 2. "When I have hurt or offended someone I am able to admit that what I did was wrong"

Item 3. "I will always try to make amends with a person whom I have offended"

Item 4. "I feel better once I apologize or admit to my wrongdoing"

Item 5. "When I have hurt or offended someone I don't usually try to seek their forgiveness"

Item 6. "Reconciling with a person whom you have hurt or offended is necessary following a wrongdoing"

Item 7. "When I have hurt or offended someone I will try to make the situation right"

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