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## The Journal of Positive Psychology: Dedicated to furthering research and promoting good practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpos20>

### Tipping the scales: Conciliatory behavior and the morality of self-forgiveness

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Published online: 22 Apr 2014.

To cite this article: Thomas P. Carpenter, Robert D. Carlisle & Jo-Ann Tsang (2014): Tipping the scales: Conciliatory behavior and the morality of self-forgiveness, *The Journal of Positive Psychology: Dedicated to furthering research and promoting good practice*, DOI: [10.1080/17439760.2014.910823](https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.910823)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.910823>

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## Tipping the scales: Conciliatory behavior and the morality of self-forgiveness

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*(Received 30 May 2013; accepted 21 March 2014)*

Two studies examined whether conciliatory behavior aids self-forgiveness and whether it does so in part by making it seem more morally appropriate. Participants in Study 1 ( $n = 269$ ) completed an offense-recall procedure; participants in Study 2 ( $n = 208$ ) imagined a social transgression under conciliatory behavior (yes, no) and receipt of forgiveness (no, ambiguous, yes) conditions. Conciliatory behavior predicted (Study 1) and caused (Study 2) elevated self-forgiveness and increased perceptions of the moral appropriateness of self-forgiveness. Perceived morality consistently mediated the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness. Received forgiveness and guilt were considered as additional mechanisms, but received mixed support. Results suggest that conciliatory behavior may influence self-forgiveness in part by satisfying moral prerequisites for self-forgiveness.

**Keywords:** self-forgiveness; apology; guilt; morality; amends; justice

Although research on interpersonal forgiveness has proliferated (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010), self-forgiveness has received less attention. Forgiveness of self and others are related processes, each involving a reduction of negative motivations and emotions and an increase in positive motivations and emotions. However, they differ in one important respect: in self-forgiveness, the offender is the primary granter of forgiveness. Consequently, self-forgiveness may have different moral dynamics than interpersonal forgiveness. For example, offenders may be tempted to be lenient on themselves, or they may feel obligated to refrain from forgiving themselves so long as the victim suffers or until the victim offers forgiveness. Not surprisingly, the moral appropriateness of self-forgiveness has been repeatedly questioned, especially in situations where remorse has not been expressed, apologies have not been offered, and amends have not been made (Lamb, 2002; Murphy, 2002).

In the present research, we explore the importance of offenders' perceptions of the appropriateness of forgiving themselves and the role of these perceptions in self-forgiveness. We test whether conciliatory behavior (e.g. apology and making amends) makes self-forgiveness seem more morally appropriate and whether this perceived morality may mediate any effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness. We also consider two other mechanisms (guilt reduction and received forgiveness) and their interplay with perceived morality.

### Morality of self-forgiveness

Because of the moral ambiguity inherent in self-forgiveness, perceptions of its moral inappropriateness may be important in the self-forgiveness process. By moral inappropriateness, we mean a moral sense that it would be unjust to release oneself from resentment and make a self-forgiving motivational transformation.

Theorists have long offered reservations about the morality of self-forgiveness (Horsbrugh, 1974). For example, Murphy (2002) argued that offenders morally deserve to feel bad about their actions. However, they have also argued that self-forgiveness becomes morally appropriate following conciliatory behavior, such as restitution (Holmgren, 2002; Horsbrugh, 1974) and repentance (Murphy, 2002). Qualitative research suggests lay individuals feel similarly, expressing reluctance to self-forgive unless they have done 'something to make it right,' such as apologizing or making amends (Ingersoll-Dayton & Krause, 2005, p. 279). No quantitative research yet exists exploring whether conciliatory behavior (or any factor) influences the perceived moral appropriateness of self-forgiveness. To the degree that self-forgiveness is a choice (Worthington, 2006), such perceptions could be especially important.

### Self-forgiveness and conciliatory behavior

We propose that the perceived moral appropriateness of self-forgiveness may partly explain why conciliatory behavior influences self-forgiveness. Conciliatory

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behavior is a class of reparative responses that includes apologizing, making amends, restitution, and seeking forgiveness (Fisher & Exline, 2010; Hall & Fincham, 2005). This overall conciliatory response serves the purpose of expressing remorse and a desire to repair the damage done by one's wrongs, reversing the dynamic caused by the offense (Exline et al., 2011). Consequently, self-forgiveness theorists (e.g. Hall & Fincham, 2005, 2008) have generally treated conciliatory behavior as an overall reparative response that is psychologically important for self-forgiveness. According to Hall and Fincham's (2005) model, conciliatory behavior should influence self-forgiveness both by reducing guilt and leading to forgiveness by others.

Empirical support for an effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness is mixed. Hall and Fincham (2008) found conciliatory behavior predicted self-forgiveness for a recalled transgression. Exline, Root, Yadavalli, Martin, and Fisher (2011) found a self-forgiveness intervention more effective for those who had previously made conciliatory gestures. They also found that post-intervention conciliatory behavior predicted intervention efficacy, but this did not replicate. Witvliet, Ludwig, and Bauer (2002) found that imagining conciliatory behavior yielded more self-forgiveness than did rumination; however, it is unknown to what degree this reflects the benefits of conciliatory behavior or the detriments of rumination.

Other studies have offered less support. Examining recalled transgressions, Cafaro and Exline (2003) found no relationship between self-forgiveness and seeking forgiveness or confession. Zechmeister and Romero (2002) similarly found no association between self-forgiveness and restitution and only a small association with apology. Fisher and Exline (2006) found conciliatory behavior predicted *greater* effort required to feel better about a past offense. Finally, Ranganadhan and Todorov (2010) found no relationship between trait self-forgiveness and conciliatory behavior. The present research will further test whether conciliatory behavior aids self-forgiveness and whether this effect may in part depend on moral perceptions of self-forgiveness.

Conciliatory behavior might affect the morality of self-forgiveness by addressing justice. Transgressions create unjust situations in which the individual who experiences the most suffering (the victim) is not the one who contributes the most harm (the offender). According to equity theory (Adams, 1965), people should be motivated to reduce this imbalance; offenders may respond by foregoing self-forgiveness and allowing themselves to suffer (Exline et al., 2011). Self-forgiveness without conciliatory behavior may be seen as unjust, both because the offender foregoes punishment and because the offender benefits from self-forgiveness while the victim remains hurt. Using Worthington's (2006) terminology, the 'injustice gap' is widened as the situation becomes

more inequitable. By directly addressing injustice, conciliatory behavior may alleviate these concerns. Conciliatory behavior may also increase the morality of self-forgiveness by demonstrating that the offender has taken appropriate responsibility. Vitz and Meade (2011) note that individuals may need to prove their remorse to themselves before 'earning the right' (p. 253) to self-forgive in order to demonstrate that they are not shirking their obligations.

### Received forgiveness and guilt reduction

Existing models emphasize guilt reduction and received forgiveness as pathways by which conciliatory behavior may aid self-forgiveness. We now consider how these pathways may relate to the perceived morality of self-forgiveness. Worthington (2006) argued that victims influence offenders' self-forgiveness by reinforcing voices of self-criticism or modeling forgiving responses. Received forgiveness may reduce guilt by signaling that relationship damage has been mitigated and providing closure. Additionally, received forgiveness may increase perceived morality of self-forgiveness. By embracing forgiveness, the victim may communicate that forgiveness is appropriate and that the offense and offender are worthy of forgiveness. Evidence for the effect of received forgiveness is limited. Some studies have reported associations between received forgiveness and self-forgiveness (Cafaro & Exline, 2003; Hall & Fincham, 2008), and others have reported null findings (Witvliet et al., 2002; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), signaling the need for more research.

Conciliatory behavior may also impact self-forgiveness by reducing guilt (Hall & Fincham, 2005). Conciliatory behavior both follows (Cryder, Springer, & Morewedge, 2012) and reduces guilt (Meek, Albright, & McMinn, 1995). Whether or not this aids self-forgiveness is unclear, with some studies suggesting a unique relationship between guilt and self-forgiveness (Hall & Fincham, 2008), and others not (Exline et al., 2011; Ranganadhan & Todorov, 2010). Because guilt provides informational cues as to the moral valence of one's actions (Ketelaar & Au, 2003), guilt reduction might make self-forgiveness seem more moral.

### The present research

In the present research, we suggest that conciliatory behavior may aid self-forgiveness in part by helping individuals feel morally permitted to forgive themselves. Specifically, we seek to test the hypothesis that morality of self-forgiveness mediates the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness directly as well as potentially indirectly, following received forgiveness and guilt reduction (see Figure 1).

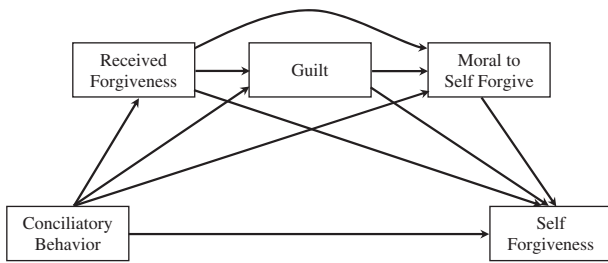


Figure 1. Theoretical model depicting potential relationships among primary study variables.

## Study 1

Study 1 examined the impact of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness for real-world offenses. Participants recalled separate offenses for which they had and had not apologized, allowing us to examine within-subjects differences in self-forgiveness as a function of conciliatory behavior. Participants also recalled an offense for which no apology criterion was specified. This allowed us to conduct between-subjects mediation path analyses without constraints on the range of conciliatory behavior and to examine potential mediators.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 269 undergraduate psychology students (184 female, 80 male, and 5 unknown) at a mid-sized private religious university.<sup>1</sup> Participants received course credit for participation. Data collection was terminated at the end of one semester.

### Procedure

Participants completed the study online, which consisted of three counterbalanced offense-recall prompts. For each prompt, participants recalled a transgression in which they were the perpetrator, followed by offense-specific self-report measures. Participants completed all measures for one offense before recalling subsequent offenses.

For the general-offense prompt, participants were told:

Now we would like to ask you to remember a time in which you seriously hurt or offended someone. Please try to think of an especially important or memorable experience rather than a trivial one. Take a few minutes to remember the incident in as much detail as you can.

Participants were given a large text box in which to type before completing the offense-specific measures. The three prompts were identical, except for the first sentence. For the apologized-offense prompt, participants

were told: ‘Now we would like to ask you to remember a time in which you seriously hurt or offended someone, for which you have apologized.’ For the no-apology prompt, this sentence ended ‘... for which you have not apologized.’

## Measures

### Self-forgiveness

Participants’ self-forgiveness for each offense was measured with the item, ‘To what extent have you forgiven yourself for the offense?’ (Hall & Fincham, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Participants responded using a 7-point scale (1 = *definitely have NOT forgiven myself*, 7 = *have totally forgiven myself*).

### Conciliatory behavior

For each offense, participants indicated on a 9-point scale (1 = *not very*, 9 = *very much*) how much they had engaged in five conciliatory behaviors: apology, confession, asking forgiveness, seeking forgiveness, and restitution. These items were culled from prior research (e.g. Fisher & Exline, 2006). Prior to analysis, an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring was conducted to verify that all items represented a general conciliatory response. Consistent with predictions, one ‘conciliatory’ factor was identified that explained 75.40% of the variance, a strong one-factor solution. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ s were excellent: 0.93 for the general offenses, 0.91 for the apologized offenses, and 0.90 for the non-apologized offenses.

### Moral appropriateness of self-forgiveness

The degree to which participants saw self-forgiveness as morally appropriate was assessed using the item, ‘To what extent would it be morally right to forgive yourself for the offense?’ Participants responded using a 9-point scale (1 = *not very right*, 9 = *extremely right*).

### Received forgiveness

Received forgiveness was measured with the item, ‘To what extent do you feel like the person/people you hurt have forgiven you for the offense?’ Participants responded using a 9-point scale (1 = *definitely has NOT forgiven me*, 9 = *has totally forgiven me*).

### Guilt and shame

Offense-specific guilt and shame were assessed with the remorse and self-condemnation scales (Exline et al., 2011; Fisher & Exline, 2006). Participants read the

prompt, 'When you think about the offense you committed, to what extent do you feel ...' followed by 10 items, each rated on an 11-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 11 = *extremely*). The six remorse items measure offense-specific guilt. Sample items included 'guilty,' 'remorse,' and 'regret about what you did.' Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were excellent: 0.93 for both the general and apologized offenses, and 0.95 for the non-apologized offenses. The four self-condemnation items measure offense-specific shame, with items such as 'like a bad person' and 'hateful toward yourself.' Reliabilities were good: 0.92 for general offenses, 0.89 for the apologized offenses, and 0.91 for the non-apologized offenses.

### Responsibility

Attributions of responsibility were assessed using items developed by Fisher and Exline (2006). Participants responded to five items on an 11-point scale (0 = *completely disagree*, 10 = *completely agree*) indicating the degree to which they perceived themselves as responsible for each offense. Sample items include 'I feel I was responsible for what happened' and 'this was clearly my fault.' Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were satisfactory: 0.79 for the general offenses, 0.81 for the apologized offenses, and 0.82 for the non-apologized offenses.

### Offense severity

Offense severity was measured by asking participants to rate on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 9 = *extremely*) the degree to which they considered their behavior 'serious,' 'harmful,' and 'immoral.' These items were drawn from prior studies and loaded on a single factor (Exline et al., 2011; Fisher & Exline, 2006). Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s were good: 0.83 for the general offenses, 0.81 for the apologized offenses, and 0.80 for the non-apologized offenses.

### Time since the offense

Participants indicated duration in time (in months) since each offense. This was included as a control as time predicts self-forgiveness and conciliatory behavior (Hall & Fincham, 2008).

### Pre-offense closeness

Participants indicated how close they were to each person they hurt prior to the offense on a 9-point scale (1 = *not very close*, 9 = *extremely close*). This was included as a control because it covaries with guilt and conciliatory behavior (Exline et al., 2011; Fisher & Exline, 2006).

## Results

### Offenses and response rates

Of the 269 participants, 15 did not report a general offense (6%), 9 did not report an apologized offense (3%), and 31 did not report an offense for which they had not apologized (11%). Response rates decreased for successive prompts (97% for the first prompt, 95% for the second prompt, and 91% for the third prompt). This left 234 participants (155 female, 76 male, and 3 unknown) who completed both the apology and no-apology prompts.

Offenses involved hurtful words (38%), inconsiderate acts (23%), trust violations (12%), physical injury (7%), social rejection (5%), break-ups (5%), romantic betrayal (5%), and gossip (4%). Time since the offense and perceived morality of self-forgiveness were square-root transformed to improve normality prior to analysis. See Tables 1 and 2 for descriptive statistics and correlations. Rates of offense type did not differ by condition,  $\chi^2(14) = 11.08$ ,  $p = 0.68$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.09$ , indicating that heterogeneity of offense types did not differ systematically across prompts. The effects below were not moderated by gender, thus results are reported for both genders combined.

### Comparing apology and no-apology prompts

We first compared the apology and no-apology prompts.

### Manipulation check

We checked that the prompts elicited different levels of conciliatory behavior. Apology was higher for the apology prompt ( $M = 7.14$ ,  $SD = 2.08$ ) than for the no-apology prompt ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 2.47$ ),  $t(233) = 16.96$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.61$ . Also, overall conciliatory behavior was higher for the apology prompt ( $M = 32.76$ ,  $SD = 9.19$ ) than for the no-apology prompt ( $M = 17.83$ ,  $SD = 10.19$ ),  $t(233) = 16.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.49$ .

### Gender differences

We used mixed-model ANOVAs to test for gender effects; gender did not interact with condition for any variables (all interaction  $p$ 's = 0.09–0.99) and consequently results were collapsed across genders. Further, there was no main effect of gender on conciliatory behavior, self-forgiveness, received forgiveness, shame, guilt, responsibility, or severity, ( $F$ s = 0.01–3.27,  $p$ s = 0.07–0.93,  $d$ s = 0.01–0.25). Women did perceive self-forgiveness as less morally permissible ( $M = 7.22$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ) than did men ( $M = 6.65$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ),  $F(1, 250) = 5.64$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ,  $d = 0.34$ . Women also reported more recent offenses, ( $M = 27.96$ ,  $SD = 24.53$ ) than

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for responses to the apology and non-apology prompts in Study 1.

Variable	Apology		No apology		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	M	SD	M	SD										
1. SF	5.32	1.70	4.89	1.75										
2. Concil	32.76	9.19	17.83	10.19	0.11 <sup>+</sup>									
3. Moral to SF	7.21	1.97	7.08	2.13	0.62***	0.22***								
4. Received F	5.61	1.51	4.21	1.98	0.41***	0.32***	0.41***							
5. Remorse	34.42	16.48	28.75	17.61	-0.34***	0.41***	-0.13*	0.02						
6. Self-cond	15.35	10.83	12.87	10.74	-0.48***	0.23***	-0.37***	-0.15*	0.72***					
7. Severity	15.96	5.74	15.00	5.84	-0.21***	0.27***	-0.17*	-0.04	0.49***	0.42***				
8. Resp	35.71	10.84	31.82	12.80	-0.07	0.32***	0.11 <sup>+</sup>	0.22***	0.44***	0.25***	0.21***			
9. Time	30.88	37.14	34.59	37.62	-0.01	0.11 <sup>+</sup>	0.05	0.12 <sup>+</sup>	0.18**	0.10	0.15*	0.20**	0.13*	0.05
10. Closeness	7.26	2.15	5.78	2.74	0.05	0.31***	0.28***	0.23***	0.16*	-0.03	0.18**	0.14*	-0.09	-0.19**

Note: Apologized offenses are below the diagonal. SF = self-forgiveness; Concil = conciliatory behavior; Moral to SF = perceived morality of self-forgiveness. Received F = received forgiveness; Self-cond = self-condemnation; Resp = responsibility; Closeness = pre-offense closeness.  
 \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , <sup>+</sup> $p < 0.10$ .

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for responses to the general-offense prompt in Study 1.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. SF	5.30	1.73									
2. Concil	28.48	11.69	0.06								
3. Moral to SF	7.33	1.99	0.57***	0.15*							
4. Received F	5.01	1.83	0.21***	0.43***	0.27***						
5. Remorse	32.20	16.99	-0.42***	0.37***	-0.24***	0.19**					
6. Self-cond	14.54	11.36	-0.52***	0.25***	-0.41***	0.06	0.76***				
7. Severity	16.06	6.29	-0.24***	0.33***	-0.12 <sup>+</sup>	0.08	0.45***	0.41***			
8. Resp	34.84	11.29	-0.26***	0.31***	-0.11 <sup>+</sup>	0.15*	0.57***	0.40***	0.30***		
9. Time	33.15	38.23	-0.10	-0.04	0.02	0.15*	0.17**	0.11 <sup>+</sup>	0.11 <sup>+</sup>	0.18**	
10. Closeness	6.63	2.45	0.03	0.50***	0.15*	0.28***	0.23***	0.14*	0.19**	0.09	-0.05

Note: SF = self-forgiveness; Concil = conciliatory behavior; Moral to SF = perceived morality of self-forgiveness; Received *F* = received forgiveness; Self-cond = self-condemnation; Resp = responsibility; Closeness = pre-offense closeness.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ , <sup>+</sup> $p < 0.10$ .

did men ( $M = 42.08$ ,  $SD = 37.27$ ),  $F(1, 220) = 11.36$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.48$  and reported higher pre-offense closeness ( $M = 6.74$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) than did men, ( $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ),  $F(1, 248) = 13.51$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.52$ . However, as noted above, gender did not moderate the effect of condition on any of these variables. Similarly, gender was not related to any variable in our mediation model,  $p$ 's = 0.09–0.64, and the mediated effect did not vary across genders. Consequently, all analyses reported below were conducted with the sample as a whole, without gender as a covariate.

#### *Differences between apology and no-apology prompts*

We first predicted that conciliatory behavior would enhance self-forgiveness. As predicted, responses to the apology prompt were significantly higher in self-forgiveness ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) than to the no-apology prompt ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ),  $t(233) = 3.17$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $d = 0.25$ . Because transgressions were not standardized (i.e. participants recalled separate offenses in each prompt), we next compared prompts to determine if something other than conciliatory behavior might explain differences in self-forgiveness.

Although we predicted that conciliatory behavior would reduce guilt, participants reported significantly more remorse (state guilt) when reflecting on responses to the apology prompt ( $M = 34.42$ ,  $SD = 16.48$ ) than to the no-apology prompt ( $M = 28.75$ ,  $SD = 28.75$ ),  $t(233) = 4.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.31$ . Participants also felt significantly more self-condemnation (state shame) when responding to the apology prompt ( $M = 15.35$ ,  $SD = 10.83$ ) than to the no-apology prompt ( $M = 12.87$ ,  $SD = 10.74$ ),  $t(233) = 2.69$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ,  $d = 0.20$ . Although more self-forgiven, offenses in the apologized-offense prompt elicited more negative feelings.

One reason participants may have felt worse about offenses for the apology prompt is that objectively worse

offenses were more likely to elicit apologies. Consistent with this, participants perceived themselves as significantly more responsible in the apology prompt condition ( $M = 35.71$ ,  $SD = 10.84$ ) than the no-apology prompt condition ( $M = 31.82$ ,  $SD = 12.80$ ),  $t(233) = 3.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.32$ , and they perceived apologized offenses as marginally more severe ( $M = 15.96$ ,  $SD = 5.74$ ) than non-apologized offenses ( $M = 15.00$ ,  $SD = 5.84$ ),  $t(232) = 1.70$ ,  $p = 0.09$ ,  $d = 0.14$ . Further item-level analysis revealed that participants perceived apologized offenses as significantly more serious,  $t(232) = 2.15$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ,  $d = 0.17$ , marginally more harmful,  $t(233) = 1.65$ ,  $p = 0.10$ ,  $d = 0.13$ , but not more immoral,  $t(233) = 0.79$ ,  $p = 0.43$ ,  $d = 0.06$ . Although responses to the apology prompt received more self-forgiveness overall, participants perceived them as worse in other ways.

We also looked for differences in time since the offense and pre-offense closeness. The two prompts did not differ in the duration of time since the offense,  $t(219) = 1.19$ ,  $p = 0.234$ ,  $d = 0.10$ . In contrast, offenses in the apology prompt took place in the context of significantly closer relationships ( $M = 7.26$ ,  $SD = 5.78$ ) than in the no-apology prompt ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 2.74$ ),  $t(232) = 6.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.59$ . However, pre-offense closeness did not correlate with self-forgiveness in either the apology or no-apology prompts,  $r$ s = 0.05 and  $-0.03$ ,  $p$ s  $> 0.40$ . Neither time since the offense nor pre-offense closeness appeared to be a tenable explanation for differences in self-forgiveness.

We theorized that conciliatory behavior would make self-forgiveness seem more moral. Contrary to hypotheses, self-forgiveness was not seen as significantly more moral in the apology prompt condition ( $M = 7.21$ ,  $SD = 1.97$ ) than the no-apology prompt condition ( $M = 7.08$ ,  $SD = 2.13$ ),  $t(233) = 0.93$ ,  $p = 0.35$ ,  $d = 0.06$ , although the difference was in the predicted direction. We suspected that a potential morality-boosting effect of conciliatory behavior may have been suppressed by the

greater levels of negative affect among apologized offenses. Consistent with this, the difference in perceived morality between the apology and no-apology prompts was re-analyzed with a repeated-measures ANCOVA controlling for remorse and self-condemnation. The difference in perceived morality between the apology prompt (adjusted  $M=7.28$ ) and the no-apology prompt (adjusted  $M=6.90$ ) became significant,  $F(1, 252)=10.20$ ,  $p=0.02$ ,  $\omega^2=0.02$ , after controlling for these differences. Further consistent with this hypothesis, conciliatory behavior and morality of self-forgiveness correlated positively *within* both prompts after self-condemnation and remorse were controlled,  $r=0.29$ ,  $p<0.001$  for the apology prompt and  $r=0.14$ ,  $p=0.03$ , for the no-apology prompt. Conciliatory behavior thus emerged as a predictor of morality of self-forgiveness when confounding differences in emotions were controlled.

Finally, we predicted that conciliatory behavior would lead to more received forgiveness. Consistent with this, participants reported receiving more forgiveness in the apology prompt condition ( $M=5.61$ ,  $SD=1.51$ ) than the no-apology prompt condition ( $M=4.21$ ,  $SD=1.98$ ),  $t(233)=3.86$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $d=0.82$ .

Mediational analysis

To test our primary hypothesis that morality of self-forgiveness explains, in part, why conciliatory behavior is related to self-forgiveness, we examined responses to the general offense prompt using a multiple mediation model using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013). This had the added benefit of allowing us to better control for negative elements of the offenses (e.g. emotions), which correlated positively with conciliatory behavior. Time since the offense, pre-offense closeness, shame, responsibility, and severity were controlled at all steps. Pre-offense closeness was included because it covaries with conciliatory behavior and guilt (Exline et al., 2011).

Coefficients from the mediation analysis are given in Figure 2. A summary of mediated effects is given in

Table 3. There was a significant total effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness,  $\beta=0.23$ ,  $p<0.001$ . The direct effect of conciliatory behavior was not significant,  $\beta=0.09$ ,  $p=0.16$ , but a significant portion of the effect of conciliatory behavior was mediated, estimate = 0.14, 95% CI [0.056, 0.243]. As predicted, morality of self-forgiveness played an important mediating role. Morality of self-forgiveness uniquely mediated the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness, estimate = 0.07, 95% CI [0.014, 0.154]. In addition, morality of self-forgiveness functioned as part of a three-path mediational chain, with conciliatory behavior predicting received forgiveness, morality of self-forgiveness, and self-forgiveness in sequence, estimate = 0.03, 95% CI [0.011, 0.058]. Together, the mediated effects containing perceived morality accounted for 45% of the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness. Morality of self-forgiveness appeared to play a significant role in explaining why conciliatory behavior predicted self-forgiveness.

Results for received forgiveness and conciliatory behavior were mixed. Received forgiveness uniquely mediated the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness, estimate = 0.05, 95% CI [0.012, 0.104]. Contrary to predictions, no mediation effects with guilt were significant.

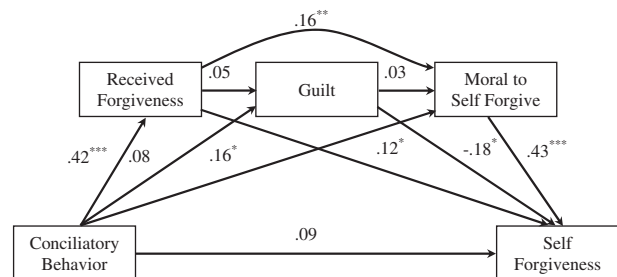


Figure 2. Standardized mediation path coefficients examining the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness in the general-offense prompt in Study 1.

Table 3. Standardized effects of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness in Study 1.

Mediated effect of conciliatory behavior	Est. (95% CI)
Concil → Moral → SF	0.07* [0.014, 0.154]
Concil → RF → SF	0.05* [0.012, 0.104]
Concil → Guilt → SF	-0.01 [-0.051, 0.003]
Concil → RF → Moral → SF	0.03* [0.011, 0.058]
Concil → RF → Guilt → SF	-0.004 [-0.020, 0.001]
Concil → Guilt → Moral → SF	0.001 [-0.004, 0.011]
Concil → RF → Guilt → Moral → SF	<0.001 [-0.001, 0.004]

Note: Concil = conciliatory behavior; RF = received forgiveness; Rem = remorse; Moral = perceived morality of self-forgiveness; SF = self-forgiveness. \* $p<0.05$ .



## Discussion

Study 1 offered support both for the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness and for the role of perceived moral appropriateness of self-forgiveness in mediating that relationship. Within-subjects analyses revealed that self-forgiveness was higher for apologized offenses, despite the fact that participants felt worse about those offenses and saw them as more severe. These differences suggest that the elevated levels of self-forgiveness among apologized offenses came in spite of, rather than because of, pre-existing differences among offenses. Although in the predicted direction, morality of self-forgiveness did not differ between the apology and no-apology prompts, possibly because of these pre-existing differences. Consistent with this, reanalysis controlling for emotions revealed significantly higher levels of perceived morality among apologized offenses. In addition, conciliatory behavior correlated positively with perceived morality in all prompts after controlling for negative emotions.

Mediational analyses within the general-offense prompt allowed us to further explore these relationships. As predicted, morality of self-forgiveness directly mediated the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness, and the total mediated effect through morality of self-forgiveness accounted for nearly half of the total relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness and over half of the mediated effect. Also as predicted, received forgiveness uniquely mediated the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness, with some of this effect going through morality of self-forgiveness. Contrary to predictions, no support was found for any guilt-reduction effects, and guilt appeared to play no mediating role.

Although Study 1 provided good initial support for our central hypotheses, one weakness was that offenses were not standardized. Although we attempted to measure and control for potential confounds, it is possible that some other difference may have explained these effects. Pre-existing differences in the offenses may have likewise weakened our ability to assess guilt-reduction effects, evidenced by the positive overall association between guilt and conciliatory behavior. To address these limitations, in Study 2 we directly manipulated conciliatory behavior in response to a standardized transgression.

Another limitation was the use of a single-item self-forgiveness measure. We chose this measure, studied in-depth by Hall and Fincham (2008), because the existing state self-forgiveness scale (Wohl et al., 2008) includes content related to, but outside of, our definition of self-forgiveness, such as shame and self-rejection (e.g. belief that the self is bad). This may be advantageous in some research contexts, but it makes it inappropriate for exam-

ining process variables related to self-forgiveness, such as emotions. Single item measures are a common solution to this issue in the emotion literature (e.g. Ellsworth & Tong, 2006), but they are not without issues (e.g. questions of breadth vs. narrowness and psychometric concerns). Although the self-forgiveness item we used in Study 1 is face valid and performed consistently with theory in both Study 1 and prior research (e.g. Hall & Fincham, 2008; Witvliet et al., 2002), for psychometric reasons, we included a three-item assessment in Study 2.

## Study 2

Study 2 tested the relationship between conciliatory behavior, perceived morality of self-forgiveness, and self-forgiveness, with greater experimental control. Participants read a standardized offense vignette and were randomly assigned to imagine either engaging or not engaging in conciliatory behavior. The use of a standardized experimental manipulation allowed us to better draw causal conclusions about the effects of conciliatory behavior. Given the importance of received forgiveness in Study 1, we attempted to further investigate its role in Study 2 by manipulating it alongside conciliatory behavior.

In replication of Study 1, we expected both conciliatory behavior and received forgiveness to influence self-forgiveness. Likewise, morality of self-forgiveness was expected to mediate both relationships. Given that offenses were now standardized, we sought to re-examine whether reduced guilt would mediate either effect or feed into morality of self-forgiveness, as predicted in Study 1.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 208 psychology undergraduates (143 female and 65 male) at a mid-sized private religious university. Data collection was terminated at the end of one semester. Eight participants took an extreme amount of time on the experiment ( $z$ 's > 3.0) and were flagged as outliers and excluded. This left a final sample of 200 (136 female and 64 male). Participants had a mean age of 19.46 years ( $SD = 1.31$ ) and were Caucasian (62%), Hispanic/Latino (14%), African-American (12%), and Asian (12%).

### Procedure

Participants completed the study online and were presented with a single transgression vignette adapted from Tangney, Boone, Fee, and Reinsmith (1999). The victim was gender-matched to the participant to keep the

offender–victim dynamic consistent for men and women. The vignette read:

Imagine that your friend was fired from [his/her] job for something [he/she] did not do. Even though you actually committed the act, you did not speak up to take the blame. However, you both knew that you were responsible. [He/she] was very upset.

Participants in the conciliatory behavior condition were then told, ‘Further imagine that you genuinely apologized, tried to fix things, and tried to make it up to [him/her].’ Participants in the non-conciliatory condition were told, ‘Further imagine that you have not apologized or tried to fix things or make it up to [him/her].’

In addition, participants were told one of three things about the friend’s forgiveness. In the no-forgiveness condition, participants were told, ‘[He/she] has not forgiven you and appears to hold a grudge against you.’ In the no-information condition, participants were not told specifically about the friend’s forgiveness. In the received-forgiveness condition, participants were told, ‘[He/she] has completely forgiven you for what you’ve done and no longer holds a grudge against you.’

## Measures

### Self-forgiveness

Participants answered three items assessing self-forgiveness, improving upon the single-item measure from Study 1: ‘How likely would you be to forgive yourself?’ ‘How forgiving do you think you would be toward yourself?’ and ‘How unforgiving do you think you would be toward yourself?’ Each item was answered on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Items loaded on a single factor, and reliability was satisfactory,  $\alpha = 0.76$ .

### Morality of self-forgiveness

Participants completed six items assessing perceived morality of self-forgiveness, improving on the single item from Study 1. Participants were asked how ‘morally right,’ ‘morally appropriate,’ ‘morally wrong,’ ‘morally

inappropriate,’ ‘unjust,’ and ‘unfair’ it would be to forgive themselves. Each item was scored on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Items loaded on a single factor, and reliability was excellent,  $\alpha = 0.91$ .

### Guilt

Participant guilt was measured with the single item, ‘How guilty would you feel?’ The item was scored on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*).<sup>3</sup>

### Received forgiveness

As a manipulation check, participants completed the items: ‘To what extent do you think the person you hurt in the story has forgiven you?’ ‘How much would you feel forgiven by the person you hurt in the story?’ and ‘How forgiving do you think the person you hurt in the story would act toward you?’ Each item was scored on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Reliability was good,  $\alpha = 0.89$ .

## Results

The data were analyzed with a 2 (conciliatory behavior)  $\times$  3 (received forgiveness) analysis of variance. Guilt was square-root transformed to improve normality prior to any analyses. Descriptive statistics and correlations are given in Table 4. There were some gender differences, with women reporting less self-forgiveness ( $M = 8.99$ ,  $SD = 3.75$ ) than men ( $M = 10.20$ ,  $SD = 3.64$ ),  $t(198) = 2.14$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ,  $d = 0.30$  and expressing more guilt ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than men ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ),  $t(198) = 2.43$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ,  $d = 0.62$ . However, women did not report different perceptions of morality of self-forgiveness ( $M = 20.51$ ,  $SD = 8.77$ ) than men ( $M = 21.70$ ,  $SD = 8.67$ ),  $t(198) = 0.90$ ,  $p = 0.37$ ,  $d = 0.14$ . Importantly, the effect of condition was not moderated by gender for any variables (all interaction  $p$ ’s  $> 0.36$ ) and thus results were collapsed across gender.

We first ensured that the received-forgiveness manipulation influenced the degree to which participants anticipated feeling forgiven. The effect was significant,  $F(2, 194) = 26.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.197$ . Post-hoc

Table 4. Means and standard deviations, and correlations for Study 2.

Variable	Conciliatory Behavior		No Conciliatory Behavior		1	2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1. SF	10.81	3.73	7.83	3.12		
2. Moral to SF	23.10	8.37	18.50	8.53	0.45***	
3. Guilt	3.94	1.15	4.35	0.92	-0.49***	-0.37***

Note: SF = self-forgiveness; Moral to SF = moral to self-forgiveness.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

analysis using the Dunn-Šidák procedure (Kirk, 2013) revealed that participants felt less forgiven in the no-forgiveness condition ( $M = 7.63$ ,  $SD = 4.29$ ) than the no-information condition ( $M = 9.21$ ,  $SD = 3.99$ ),  $t_{DS}(194, 2) = -2.30$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.020$ ,  $d = 0.38$ . Similarly, participants felt more forgiven in the received-forgiveness condition ( $M = 12.42$ ,  $SD = 3.69$ ) than the no-information condition,  $t_{DS}(194, 2) = 4.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.081$ ,  $d = 0.83$ . The trend among conditions was linear,  $F(1, 197) = 48.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.19$ , with no higher-order components,  $F(1, 197) = 1.83$ ,  $p = 0.18$ ,  $\omega^2 < 0.001$ , indicating that the manipulation yielded three linearly increasing levels of received forgiveness.

As predicted, there was a significant self-forgiveness enhancing effect of conciliatory behavior. Participants self-forgave more in the conciliatory condition ( $M = 10.81$ ,  $SD = 3.73$ ) than the non-conciliatory condition ( $M = 7.83$ ,  $SD = 3.12$ ),  $F(1, 194) = 36.62$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.15$ ,  $d = 0.86$ . Participants also saw self-forgiveness as more moral in the conciliatory condition ( $M = 23.10$ ,  $SD = 8.37$ ) than the non-conciliatory condition ( $M = 18.50$ ,  $SD = 8.53$ ),  $F(1, 194) = 14.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.067$ ,  $d = 0.27$ . Finally, participants felt less guilt in the conciliatory condition ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) than the non-conciliatory condition ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ),  $F(1, 194) = 11.07$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $\omega^2 = 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.47$ . Conciliatory behavior thus had all the predicted effects.

Contrary to predictions, there were no main effects of received forgiveness on self-forgiveness,  $F(2, 194) = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.66$ ,  $\omega^2 < 0.001$ , perceived morality of self-forgiveness,  $F(2, 194) = 0.47$ ,  $p = 0.63$ ,  $\omega^2 < 0.001$ , or guilt,  $F(2, 194) = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.83$ ,  $\omega^2 < 0.001$ . There were no interactions between treatments (all  $p$ 's  $> 0.15$ ).

*Mediational analysis*

Mediation was examined using the PROCESS macro for SPSS. As in Study 1, bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapped confidence intervals were estimated with 10,000 resamples. Conciliatory behavior was dummy

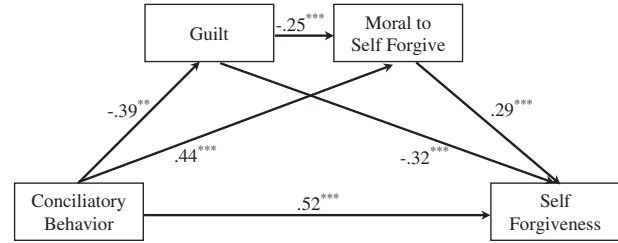


Figure 3. Mediation paths coefficients depicting the effect of conciliatory behavior in Study 2. Conciliatory behavior was dummy coded; other variables were standardized.

coded ( $-0.5 =$  no conciliatory behavior,  $0.5 =$  conciliatory behavior). Given the linear relationship among the received-forgiveness conditions, received forgiveness was dummy coded ( $-1 =$  no forgiveness,  $0 =$  no specification,  $1 =$  forgiveness). All other variables were standardized to facilitate interpretation. Thus, mediation estimates are scaled analogously to Cohen's  $d$ . Because gender did not moderate any experimental effect (see above), mediation models were collapsed across gender.

A summary of mediated effects is given in Table 5. Following Study 1, guilt and morality of self-forgiveness (both uniquely and in-sequence) were examined as mediators of the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness (see Figure 3). The total effect was significant,  $\beta = 0.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . As expected, morality of self-forgiveness uniquely mediated the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness, estimate = 0.13, 95% CI [0.045, 0.241]. As predicted, guilt reduction also mediated the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness, estimate = 0.12, 95% CI [0.040, 0.245]. In addition, conciliatory behavior predicted guilt, which in turn predicted morality of self-forgiveness and self-forgiveness in sequence. This sequential mediation was significant, estimate = 0.03, 95% CI [0.008, 0.071]. Together, effects containing morality of self-forgiveness accounted for 55% of the mediated effect and appeared to explain, in part, why conciliatory behavior led to self-forgiveness. In addition, guilt reduction played an important

Table 5. Mediated effects on self-forgiveness in Study 2.

Mediated effect of conciliatory behavior	Est. (95% CI)
Total mediated effect:	0.28*** [0.140, 0.445]
Concil → Moral → SF	0.13** [0.045, 0.241]
Concil → Guilt → SF	0.12** [0.040, 0.245]
Concil → Guilt → Moral → SF	0.03** [0.008, 0.071]
Mediated effect of received forgiveness	
Total mediated effect:	0.02 [-0.073, 0.097]
RF → Moral → SF	0.03 [-0.018, 0.081]
RF → Guilt → SF	-0.01 [-0.070, 0.049]
RF → Guilt → Moral → SF	0.03 [-0.020, 0.081]

Note: Because conditions were dummy coded and DVs and mediators were standardized, coefficients are in units of Cohen's  $d$ . Concil = conciliatory behavior; RF = received forgiveness; Moral = perceived morality of self-forgiveness; SF = self-forgiveness.

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

mediating role, both in conjunction with morality of self-forgiveness and on its own. However, unlike Study 1, no effects of conciliatory behavior was mediated.

### Discussion

In replication of Study 1, conciliatory behavior caused increases in both self-forgiveness and morality of self-forgiveness. Also as in Study 1, morality of self-forgiveness mediated the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness.

Unlike Study 1, which used non-standardized offenses, conciliatory behavior reduced guilty feelings. This guilt-reduction effect is consistent with past research (Meek et al., 1995) and explained some of the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness. As predicted, this effect partly explained some of the effect of conciliatory behavior on perceived morality, and in turn, self-forgiveness.

Also in contrast to Study 1, received forgiveness did not have any influence on self-forgiveness or perceived morality of self-forgiveness. Although it is possible that there is no causal connection between received forgiveness and self-forgiveness, it is also possible that the manipulation failed because it merely informed participants they were forgiven. It did not model expressions of compassion or relational repair, which may be important for self-forgiveness (Worthington, 2006). Past research has also found that merely informing people that their transgressions are forgiven can *increase* perceived inequity (Kelln & Ellard, 1999). Such effects may have canceled out any forgiveness-enhancing effect. Consistent with this, supplementary analyses using the received-forgiveness manipulation check as a mediator revealed a positive indirect effect of received forgiveness on self-forgiveness, estimate = 0.28, 95% CI [0.188, 0.391] and a negative direct effect,  $\beta = -0.23$ ,  $p = 0.004$ , which canceled out to yield the null main effect. In other words, the received-forgiveness manipulation appeared to boost self-forgiveness by making participants feel more forgiven, yet hinder self-forgiveness directly. Similar results were observed with perceived morality and guilt as dependent variables. Although unpredicted, these exploratory results suggest a possible explanation for the null effect of the manipulation and the discrepancy between findings in Studies 1 and 2. Because received forgiveness was less central to the present investigation, we considered these findings interesting but did not explore them further.

### General discussion

Across two studies, we found support for the role of perceived morality of self-forgiveness in explaining why conciliatory behavior may increase self-forgiveness. In Study 1, when negative emotions were controlled, posi-

tive associations emerged in all Study 1 prompts between conciliatory behavior and morality of self-forgiveness, and differences emerged between the apologized and non-apologized offense prompts. A standardized experimental manipulation of conciliatory behavior in Study 2 further demonstrated the causal effect of conciliatory behavior on morality of self-forgiveness. As predicted, morality of self-forgiveness served as a mediator in both studies, explaining some of the relationship between conciliatory behavior and self-forgiveness. In both studies, perceived morality uniquely mediated the effect of conciliatory behavior on self-forgiveness. In addition, morality functioned as part of more complex indirect effects. In Study 1, conciliatory behavior predicted received forgiveness, which, in turn, predicted perceived morality and then self-forgiveness. In Study 2, conciliatory behavior caused decreased guilt, which predicted perceived morality and self-forgiveness in sequence. This supports our central hypothesis that perceived morality of self-forgiveness partially explains why conciliatory behavior aids self-forgiveness.

The present research examined perceived morality of self-forgiveness alongside two other proposed mechanisms underlying conciliatory behavior: received forgiveness and guilt reduction. In support of Worthington (2006) and Hall and Fincham (2005), received forgiveness played a mediating role on its own in Study 1 and, as predicted, fed into morality of self-forgiveness. In contrast, a manipulation of received forgiveness in Study 2 did not increase self-forgiveness. Exploratory analyses suggested that the manipulation had both forgiveness-promoting and forgiveness-inhibiting effects that canceled out. However, it is also possible that there is no causal effect of received forgiveness on self-forgiveness or that such effects are contingent upon how forgiveness is expressed. Further research is needed to more definitively specify when and how expressions of forgiveness may enhance self-forgiveness.

We also found inconsistent evidence for Hall and Fincham's (2005) hypothesis that conciliatory behavior aids self-forgiveness by reducing guilt, with effects observed in Study 2 but not in Study 1. This is not surprising, given that guilt correlated positively with conciliatory behavior in Study 1 and that conciliatory behavior is a response to guilt (Cryder et al., 2012). Because the guilt-reduction effects were observed with a standardized offense in Study 2, we suspect that Study 1 may have failed to detect underlying guilt-reduction effects.

This research benefited from a combination of recalled-offense and vignette approaches. Participants in Study 1 recalled more serious, real-world transgressions, giving results external validity. However, the offenses in Study 1 were not standardized, introducing the possibility that some unmeasured variables may have caused the observed effects. This weakness was addressed in Study

2, which used a controlled vignette approach. Although the vignette had less psychological realism than an actual offense, the replication of our primary predicted effects lends further support for our conclusions.

One limitation of the present research is that both studies were based on self-report measures. Future research could attempt to extend this work by assessing behavioral, physiological, and/or implicit indicators of self-forgiveness for recalled or induced transgressions. Another limitation is that both samples were drawn from college populations, which may not be representative of the population at large. A community sample, for example, might have recalled more diverse transgressions than were represented here, increasing generalizability. Similarly, the present sample was drawn from a religiously affiliated university. Although religion was not a focus of the present investigation, it is possible that religious beliefs could play a role in the moral appraisals of self-forgiveness. Future research could deliberately explore the role of religion in moral attitudes toward self-forgiveness or seek to compare and contrast moral attitudes toward self-forgiveness among different populations.

The present research utilized a measured-mediator cross-sectional approach. We found that imagining conciliatory behavior increased both self-forgiveness and perceived morality of self-forgiveness. However, it is possible that self-forgiveness increased perceived morality (e.g. justification) rather than the other way around. Similarly, although we found that guilt was associated with decreased moral perceptions in Study 2, it is possible that the causal direction among mediators was reversed (e.g. the sense that it would be morally wrong to self-forgive could amplify moral emotions). Although our interpretation is consistent with theory, future research could attempt to explore such alternate possibilities by directly manipulating the perceived morality of self-forgiveness and/or moral emotions surrounding an unforgiven offense. Finally, the present findings examine state-level variables; future research could build on these findings by examining whether individual differences in moral attitudes or justice motives yield similar results.

One additional direction for research could be to explore different kinds of conciliatory behavior. We focused on overall conciliatory responses here, following theoretical and empirical work by Exline et al. (2011) that suggests that conciliatory behavior inverts the offender's relationship to the offense from one of transgressor to one of repair. This was further justified by our analysis of conciliatory behaviors in Study 1, which revealed that conciliatory behaviors were highly homogenous and tended to load on a single factor. However, it is also possible that different conciliatory behaviors function differently; future research could explore the different effects of behaviors such as apology, restitution, and confession on self-forgiveness.

The present research has implications for self-forgiveness theory. To date, there has been little discussion over motivations behind self-unforgiveness and those factors that prevent self-forgiveness (for an exception, see Fisher & Exline, 2010). The present research builds on theoretical work by Exline et al. (2011) and qualitative work by Ingersoll-Dayton and Krause (2005) and suggests that one important factor in self-unforgiveness may be a moral sense that it would be unjust to release oneself from unforgiveness. It may often be the case that individuals wish to self-forgive yet find themselves resistant to it – at least until they have first done something to make things right. Such moral prerequisites for self-forgiveness may be important aspects of the recovery process.

Self-forgiveness may reside within morally ambiguous territory, and individuals may, at times, believe that they deserve to continue to pay for their wrongs. However, by making amends individuals may find themselves able to tip the scales of justice and give themselves moral permission to self-forgive.

### Funding

This research was supported in part by a generous grant from the Fetzer Institute.

### Notes

1. Due to an error, age and ethnicity data for these participants were not recorded.
2. Although a scale assessing self-forgiveness does exist (Wohl, DeShea, & Wahkinney, 2008), it was not used here, as items go beyond self-forgiveness as defined by Hall and Fincham (2005) and include related antecedent constructs (e.g. shame, self-rejection, and bad self-attributions). We sought to separately measure these constructs and model their relationships to self-forgiveness, and thus a narrower measure of self-forgiveness was used.
3. We chose a single-item measure of guilt over a guilt scale (e.g. as in Study 1) because guilt scales ask about the subjective experience of emotion, which participants would not experience during an imagination task.

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