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HEXACO Personality Predictors of Self, Victim, and Divine Forgiveness Among Christian College Students

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Background

We are often encouraged to seek and grant forgiveness because it transcends into the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and spiritual realms. Forgiveness as a subject of psychological study is a relatively new topic in the social sciences literature. While interpersonal forgiveness has been extensively studied, other types of forgiveness, namely, self, victim, and divine forgiveness, have not been examined as thoroughly. A previous study found that both divine and perceived victim forgiveness was a predictor of self-forgiveness (Kim et al., 2021). Religious beliefs act as a core motivating factor in fostering a healthier lifestyle for individuals (Fincham, 2022). Spiritual maturity can offer an explanation for the healthier coping mechanisms individuals practice after being wronged, with a positive correlation between spirituality and forgiveness (Fincham & May, 2021). The lack of spiritual maturity might lead to a negative perception of divine forgiveness and affect toward God, with the fixation with one's own sin and guilt leading to religious struggles that place a strain on the relationship between the individual and God (Fincham & May, 2021). This ultimately can influence their ability to accept forgiveness as well as forgive others and themselves. The ability to accept or reject forgiveness is a coping mechanism for feelings of guilt or shame that positively or negatively affect an individual's overall physiological, psychological, relational, and spiritual well-being (Matuszewski & Moron, 2022; Exline et al., 2002; Strelan et al., 2009; Zarzycka, 2019; Davis et al., 2015; Griffin et al., 2015). Upon receiving forgiveness, individuals have an increase in positive emotions, moral and emotional maturity, hope, and empathy, with a reduction in self-blame, depressive symptoms, and suicidal tendencies (Witvliet et al.,2002; Da Silva et al., 2017; Struthers et al., 2008; Griffin et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2021). This study aims to explore HEXACO personality factors that may predict self, victim, and divine forgiveness in the context of the specific wrongdoing participants recalled.

Introduction and Research Question

A notable meta-analysis examined the relationships between HEXACO personality factors and forgiveness, finding that neuroticism, agreeableness, and humility influenced forgiveness (Hodge et al., 2019). In addition, receiving God's forgiveness positively correlated with agreeableness, and the dutiful component of conscientiousness (Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Agreeableness also acted as a mediator between entitlement and forgiveness, suggesting that narcissistic offenders are less likely to experience guilt and apologize for their wrongdoings (Strelan, 2007; Shoikhedbrod et al., 2019). Narcissism and neuroticism have a strong inverse relationship with humility (Exline & Geyer, 2002; Lesley, 2004), and many research studies support a positive relationship between humility and self-forgiveness (Cardak, 2013; Krause, 2015; Sezgin & Erdoğan, 2018; Onody et al., 2020). Honesty/humility can positively predict guilt-proneness (Fang et al., 2019). Guilt is one of the leading components in perceived victim forgiveness (Witvliet et al., 2002). Many studies show that the victim's forgiveness exacerbates the offender's distress and does not relieve feelings of guilt if the offender has greater empathy and emotionality (Furukawa et al., 2021; Carpenter et al., 2014; Kelln & Ellard, 1999; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002; Basford, 2014; Dwiwardani et al., 2014). The current study seeks to bridge some of these gaps by looking at the associations between personality factors and the three types of forgiveness: self-, divine, and victim forgiveness. Our research questions are as follows:
- Are there associations between the six personality factors as measured by HEXACO and the three types of forgiveness: self-, divine, and victim? [Correlation]
- If so, would personality factors uniquely contribute to explaining each type of forgiveness after controlling for the other two types? [Regression]

Participants and Procedure

A total of 160 undergraduate and graduate university students (Male = 32; Female 127) with a mean age of 35 (SD = 13.758), taking an online psychology course at a large private Christian university in Central Virginia, provided data for the current analysis. Participants filled out an online survey that included self-report measures of self, victim, and divine forgiveness as well as personality predictors. All participants identified themselves as Christian of various denominations. 76.9% of the participants (N = 123) identified themselves as White (African American = 9.4%, Asian = 1.9%, American Indian/Alaska Native = 1.9%, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander = 0.6%, and Other = 9.4%).

Methods

Self-Forgiveness: Participants filled out the 30-item Enright Forgiveness Inventory (EFI; Subkoviak et al., 1995), which measured the participants' affect, behavior, and cognition toward themselves after recalling their most recent experience of hurting another individual. This utilized the 6-point Likert scale.

Victim-Forgiveness: Participants filled out the 7-item Victim-Forgiveness Scale (Kim et al., 2021), which measured the transgressors' perceives they have been forgiven by the victim regardless of whether forgiveness from the victim was directly expressed to them or not. This utilized the 7-point Likert scale.

Divine-Forgiveness: Participants filled out the 7-item Divine-Forgiveness Scale (Kim et al., 2021), which measures an individual's perception that they have been forgiven by God. This utilized the 7-point Likert scale. The score range is from 5 (lowest) to 35 (highest).

HEXACO Personality Predictors: Participants filled out the 60-item HEXACO-PI-R 60-item version, which measured Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experiences traits (Ashton & Lee, 2001). This utilized the 7-point Likert scale.

After the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked questions about their personality in relation to the HEXACO scale. Then, participants were asked to identify an incident in which they had wronged another person and violated their personal sense of justice. This was followed by a measure of victim forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Victim and divine forgiveness measures were randomly presented before the self-forgiveness measure.

Table 1. *Correlations Between HEXACO Variables and Divine, Victim, and Self-Forgiveness*

Correlations

		HUMILITY	EMOTIONALITY	EXTRAVERSION	AGREEABLENESS	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE	VF	DF	ESFI
HUMILITY	Pearson Correlation	1	.019	.111	.308**	.269**	.085	.092	.217**	.160*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.817	.165	<.001	<.001	.290	.248	.006	.045
	N	158	156	157	158	157	156	158	158	158
EMOTIONALITY	Pearson Correlation	.019	1	-.320**	-.083	-.132	-.118	-.099	-.126	-.316**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.817		<.001	.299	.100	.143	.215	.115	<.001
	N	156	158	157	158	157	156	158	158	158
EXTRAVERSION	Pearson Correlation	.111	-.320**	1	.221**	.217**	.281**	.098	.263**	.615**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.165	<.001		.005	.006	<.001	.218	<.001	<.001
	N	157	157	159	159	158	157	159	159	159
AGREEABLENESS	Pearson Correlation	.308**	-.083	.221**	1	.081	.168*	-.014	.165*	.246**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.299	.005		.308	.034	.865	.037	.002
	N	158	158	159	160	159	158	160	160	160
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	Pearson Correlation	.269**	-.132	.217**	.081	1	.267**	.108	.112	.229**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.100	.006	.308		<.001	.174	.162	.004
	N	157	157	158	159	159	157	159	159	159
OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE	Pearson Correlation	.085	-.118	.281**	.168*	.267**	1	-.097	-.040	.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.290	.143	<.001	.034	<.001		.224	.622	.180
	N	156	156	157	158	157	158	158	158	158
VF	Pearson Correlation	.092	-.099	.098	-.014	.108	-.097	1	.222**	.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.248	.215	.218	.865	.174	.224		.005	<.001
	N	158	158	159	160	159	158	160	160	160
DF	Pearson Correlation	.217**	-.126	.263**	.165*	.112	-.040	.222**	1	.388**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.115	<.001	.037	.162	.622	.005		<.001
	N	158	158	159	160	159	158	160	160	160
ESFI	Pearson Correlation	.160*	-.316**	.615**	.246**	.229**	.107	.276**	.388**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.045	<.001	<.001	.002	.004	.180	<.001	<.001	
	N	158	158	159	160	159	158	160	160	160

. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. *ANOVA of Personality Predictors related to Devine Forgiveness*

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	30.910	5.738		5.387	<.001
	HUMILITY	.166	.084	.164	1.971	.051
	EMOTIONALITY	-.035	.068	-.043	-.524	.601
	EXTRAVERSION	.198	.071	.240	2.781	.006
	AGREEABLENESS	.078	.082	.079	.953	.342
	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	.080	.089	.074	.897	.371
	OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE	-.109	.079	-.113	-1.391	.167

a. Dependent Variable: DF

Table 3. *ANOVA for Personality Predictors Related to Self-Forgiveness*

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	52.387	19.368		2.705	.008
	HUMILITY	.190	.285	.045	.666	.506
	EMOTIONALITY	-.380	.228	-.111	-1.664	.098
	EXTRAVERSION	1.893	.240	.549	7.897	<.001
	AGREEABLENESS	.456	.278	.110	1.640	.103
	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	.591	.300	.130	1.971	.051
	OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE	-.245	.265	-.060	-.923	.357

a. Dependent Variable: ESFI

Table 4. *ANOVA of Personality Predictors Related to Perceived Victim*

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	31.705	10.392		3.051	.003
	HUMILITY	.121	.153	.069	.794	.428
	EMOTIONALITY	-.091	.122	-.064	-.741	.460
	EXTRAVERSION	.149	.129	.105	1.160	.248
	AGREEABLENESS	-.089	.149	-.052	-.595	.553
	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	.217	.161	.116	1.349	.179
	OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE	-.188	.142	-.112	-1.320	.189

a. Dependent Variable: VF

Table 5. *Self Forgiveness Regression*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.662[a]	.439	.415	20.39947

a. Predictors: (Constant), OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE, HUMILITY, EMOTIONALITY, CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, AGREEABLENESS, EXTRAVERSION

Table 6. *Victim Forgiveness Regression*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.217[a]	.047	.008	10.94597

a. Predictors: (Constant), OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE, HUMILITY, EMOTIONALITY, CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, AGREEABLENESS, EXTRAVERSION

Table 7. *Divine Forgiveness Regression*

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.367[a]	.135	.099	6.04365

a. Predictors: (Constant), OPENNESS_TO_EXPERIENCE, HUMILITY, EMOTIONALITY, CONSCIENTIOUSNESS, AGREEABLENESS, EXTRAVERSION

Table 8. *ANOVA of Personality Predictors related to Devine Forgiveness*

Population Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
What is your gender?	160	1.806	.411	.169
What is your age (Please answer in numbers)	159	36.572	13.714	188.081
What is your race/ethnicity?	160	1.681	1.522	2.317
Valid N (listwise)	159			

Std. Deviation and Variance use N rather than N-1 in denominators.

Table 9. *Divine Forgiveness Reliability*

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.855	7

Table 10. *Victim Forgiveness Reliability*

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.909	7

Table 11. *Self Forgiveness Reliability*

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.950	30

Table 12. *HEXACO Reliability*

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.784	60

Results and/or Conclusion

Results

For the final analysis, 6 participants were removed due to pseudo forgiveness. A Pearson correlation coefficient was performed to determine the relationship between participants' scores on a measure of the HEXACO personality traits and VF, DF, and ESFI. After controlling all the other five factors of HEXACO, our results found that humility had no significant correlation with VF but found a marginally significant correlation with DF (r = .217, p = .006) and ESFI (r = .160, p = .045) respectively. Emotionality had no significant correlation with VF and DF but found a significant correlation with ESFI (r = -.316, p = <.001). Extraversion had no significant correlation with VF but found a significant correlation with DF (r(158=.263), p = <.001) and ESFI (r =.615, p = <.001) respectively. Agreeableness had no significant correlation with VF but found a significant correlation with DF (r = .165, p = .037) and ESFI (r =.246, p = .002) respectively. Conscientiousness had no significant correlation with VF and DF but found a significant correlation with ESFI (r =.229, p = .004). Openness to experience had no significant correlation to DF, VF, and ESFI. Three regression analyses were conducted to determine whether HEXACO personality traits predicts VF, DF, and ESFI. There was a significant effect between HEXACO personality traits and DF (R^2= .14, f(6, 145)= 3.758, p=.002), a non-significant effect between HEXACO personality traits and VF (R^2= .05, f(6, 145)= 1.197, p =.311), and a significant effect between HEXACO personality traits and ESFI (R^2= .44, f(6, 145) = 18.878, p = .000).

Conclusions

Through our results, we were able to determine which of the HEXACO personality factors correlated with the three types of forgiveness and which factors uniquely contributed to the forgiveness types. When looking at how our expectations varied from our results, we often expected VF to have similar correlations with the HEXACO traits as the other forms of forgiveness. This expectation was made in light of previous research that shows a relationship between the three types of forgiveness (Kim et al., 2021). However, VF failed to show a correlation with any of the HEXACO traits. Another deviation from our expectations can be found in our Emotionality results. We predicted that all three forms of forgiveness would be negatively correlated with Emotionality based on previously conducted research that showed that emotion regulation strategies mediate the relationship between forgiveness and quality of life (Zhang et al., 2020). Our data showed a correlation with ESFI but not DF or VF. This brings to attention an important element of our study; many of the hypotheses were exploratory and lacked sufficient prior research for initial support. No prior research pertaining to observing a potential relationship between VF and HEXACO traits could be found. Because of its exploratory nature in this area, this study is the first of its kind. One notable relationship that could be observed in the data is that VF, ESFI, and DF all strongly correlated, which confirms prior research on the three types of forgiveness (Kim et al., 2021). Though further studies are necessary, the relationship between HEXACO personality traits and the three types of forgiveness may give insight that proves valuable in various psychological fields.

Future Work

1. Exploring state level self-forgiveness in relation to personality factors
2. Determining why perceived victim forgiveness did not show significant correlations between HEXACO personality traits
3. Replicating the study and exploring divine forgiveness in different denominations within Christianity
4. Expanding upon empathy (emotionality) and how if affects self, divine, and victim forgiveness
5. Exploring divine forgiveness within other religions and modifying the forgiveness scale to be more generalized to different populations
6. Comparing HEXACO and OCEAN personality scales with divine forgiveness and victim forgiveness

References and/or Acknowledgments