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The foremost gift or the impossible ideal to reach? Valorial components of forgiveness among Italian adolescents

In the year 2006, the American Psychological Association published a series of Research Briefs brochures to make available to the public short outlines on contemporary psychological studies of themes relevant to the United Nations' mission. One of the items that was listed and given a considerable attention within the psychological field was 'forgiveness'. That initiative, despite the fact that forgiveness has been considered rather a theological issue, has generated a great interest among psychologists, thus leading them to undertake some projects on forgiveness. In accordance with this concept of forgiveness, we chose in this research to investigate an individual's ability to forgive as related to a basic human value. The study involved 274 Italian adolescents between 14 and 19 years of age. To measure variables involved in the research we used the following instruments: Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-12), The Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS) adapted to the adolescents' sample, Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS), and Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). The results obtained in the study show that forgiveness is positively related to self-transcendent and conservation values, and negatively correlated with self-enhancement and openness to change values.

Key words: *Forgiveness, Avoidance, Revenge, Basic Human Values*

Introduction

To talk about forgiveness in a contemporary society may seem out of place due to an Occidental culture that tends to depict some elements of individualism, the search for self-affirmation and power; it does not nurture within oneself a disposition to forgive (Giusti & Corte, 2009). In fact, life experiences, popular press and scientific literature confirm that people usually consider forgiveness as one of the most challenging acts to convey. Moreover, interdisciplinary research on forgiveness reveals that despite the positive influence, this phenomenon exercises on the mental and physical well-being, as well as on interpersonal relationships, adults and adolescents find it difficult to forgive their transgressors (Subkoviak et. al., 1995), often holding on to resentment or plotting revenge.

In the last two decades psychologists have begun to explore the concept of forgiveness, to investigate why it is so difficult to forgive and to identify the different variables that contribute to its development. Throughout the years

of scientific research and exploration, forgiveness has been considered silently as a religious issue and not worthy of scientific questioning. It has been neglected throughout the years and deprived of explicit and systematic attention (McCullough, Exline, & Baumeister, 1998; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Musekura, 2010).

Although several theorists have noted disagreements among scholars regarding the definition of forgiveness and its operational model (Sparks & Baumeister, 2008), some psychologists have currently revealed an emerging agreement on its certain characteristics. First of all, forgiveness is an inner process that occurs over time and implicates both decreasing negative emotions and a changing in cognitions, motivations, and actions toward the transgressor. A forgiving person does not seek vengeance or compensation, but neither relieves the offender of responsibility for the psychological, emotional, physical or moral damage (Coyle & Enright, 1998; Denton & Martin, 1998). Forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation. While forgiveness involves one person's decision to render

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it, reconciliation occurs when two people decide to come together and exchange forgiveness (Subkoviak et al., 1995; Worthington, 1998).

In regards to the inquiry, “Why it is difficult to forgive?”, the research has revealed that there are strong specific-situation and dispositional predictors that result in the lack of forgiveness. For example, from a situational perspective the unwillingness to forgive can be associated with an offence being highly severe, the perception of a malevolent intention by the transgressor, pre-offence closeness, commitment to the wrongdoer, the scarcity of an apology expectancy of re-offence, or other negative post-transgression (Ahadi, 2009). Instead, from a dispositional point of view, people who manifest high neuroticism and low agreeableness are more predisposed to being easily insulted and revengeful (McCullough, Bellah, Kilpatrick, & Johnson, 2001). Also those who demonstrate narcissistic entitlement, that consists in expectations of special and preferential treatment from others, are less inclined to forgive because of their belief in their own superiority (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004).

Besides these personality characteristics, a willingness to forgive seems to be connected to other personal factors, such as values (Mullins, 2008; Volk, Thöni, & Ruigrok, 2011) which are “commonly defined as transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or a group” (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005, p. 1010). The overall review of the research on forgiveness and human values showed that until now, few psychologists have studied the association between both phenomena, but both have recently been gaining greater significance in psychology (Cieciuch, 2011; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). One of the first researchers who influenced the psychology of forgiveness was Milton Rokeach who included the capacity of “being forgiving” in the set of instrumental values (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). According to the empirical results reported by the author (Rokeach, 1969; 1973), there is positive connection between religious involvement and forgiveness. Participants who attended church more frequently, considered religion as very important in their daily life, and expressed intrinsic motivations for being devoted, situated the value of forgiveness higher in the rankings than respondents who seldom participated in the church sermons, thought about themselves as less religious, and acted on the extrinsic motivations. In fact, people who frequented church, located forgiveness (in mean) in the second place, and those participants who declared themselves as unbelievers, placed it in the sixteenth position. Most recently, similar results, although obtained in another kind of empirical design, received Giacomo Bono e Michael E. McCullough (2004) who observed that religious oriented people were inclined to describe themselves as more forgiving and less disposed to retaliation than those who consider themselves as less religious.

Another interesting outcome, revealing a connection between forgiveness and values, received Tyler G. Okimoto with collaborators (2012), who found just recently that a retributive orientation, inherent to revenge towards transgressor, is positively correlated with self-enhancement (e.g.: power and achievement), described by Shalom H. Schwartz in his Theory of Basic Human Values. Instead, according to the same author, restorative orientation, consisting in a recuperative approach to the offender, is positively connected to self-transcendence (e.g.: universalism and benevolence). Comparable outcomes regarded forgiveness. In fact, forgiving was related positively to other-focused values, such as universalism and benevolence, and negatively to self-focused values, such as power, achievement, hedonism, and security. Also John Maltby et al. (Maltby, Day, & Barber, 2005) pointed out that negative forgiving conditions were associated with hedonic short-term happiness and positive forgiving was linked to eudaimonic long-term happiness.

Due to lack of psychological studies among adults and adolescents regarding the relationship between a disposition to forgive and different values, the main aim in this study is to verify how values organised by Schwartz (2011), along two bipolar dimensions of self-enhancement versus self-transcendence and conservation versus openness to change, are correlated to capacity of forgiveness, especially in relation to motivations of revenge and avoidance measured by the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-12). In the light of Okimoto’s and colleagues’ outcomes (2012) we hypothesized that values which represent people who search for social recognition and power, wealth and success, security and pleasure (values of self-enhancement and openness to change) would be more retributive and avoidant and, therefore, they will be less forgiving. At contrary, people who are helpful, honest, responsible, obedient, close to tradition, and live in inner harmony with others and with nature (self-transcendence and conservation) will be in a better position to demonstrate the act of forgiveness.

Based on the circumplex prototype of values proposed by Schwartz (Figure 1) and the empirical findings obtained in different studies (Cohrs, Moschner, Maes, & Kielmann, 2005; Fontaine, Luyten, & Corveleyn, 2000; Frimer & Walker, 2009; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995), we further specified the above mentioned general hypothesis into some specific hypotheses.

In fact, Schwartz’ circular model allows us to predict, to a certain extent, the associations between the 10 types of values and external variables of forgiveness, according to sinusoid pattern (Fontaine, Luyten, & Corveleyn, 2000). Thus, in the first place, we hypothesize that avoidance (TRIM-12), revenge (TRIM-12), and unforgiveness (MOFS) will correlate highly and negatively with benevolence and universalism, both related to preservation and enhancement of the welfare of close once or people in

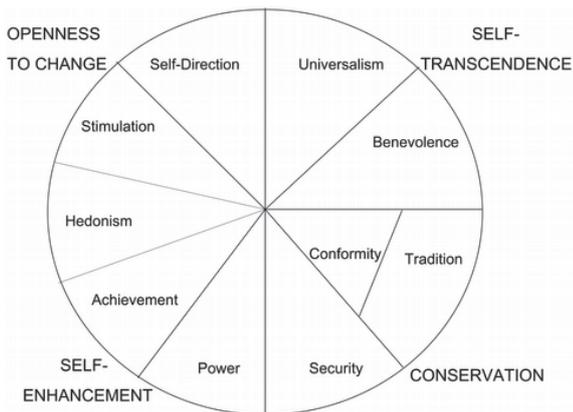


Figure 1. Structure of relations among motivationally distinct values (Schwartz, S. H. & Rubel, T., 2005, p. 439)

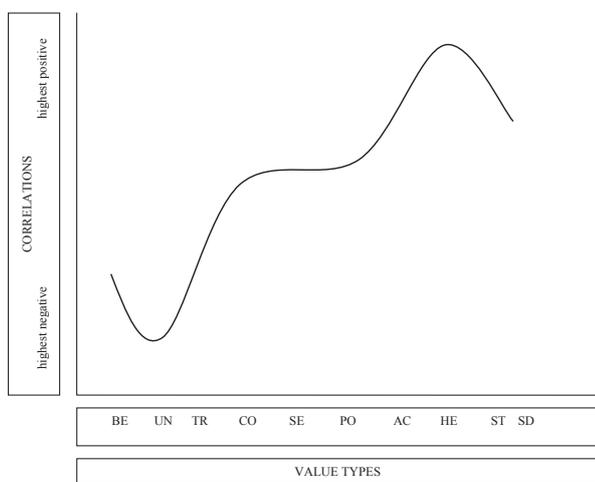


Figure 2. Sinusoid curve of hypothesized correlations between value priorities and negative dimensions of forgiveness (avoidance, revenge, and unforgiveness). BE = benevolence; UN = universalism; TR = tradition; CO = conformity; SE = security; PO = power; AC = achievement; HE = hedonism; ST = stimulation; SD = self-direction.

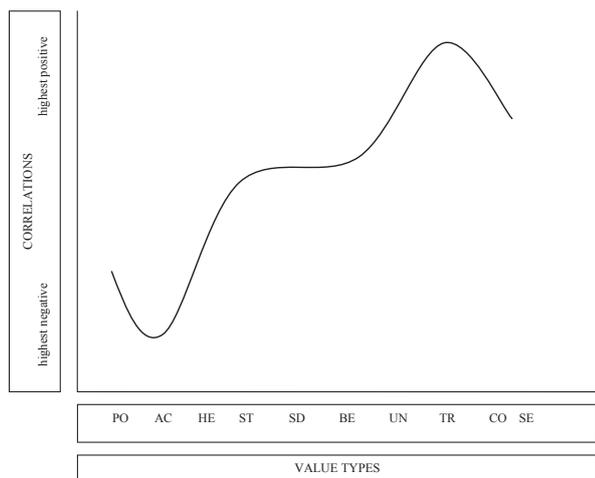


Figure 3. Sinusoid curve of hypothesized correlations between value priorities and positive dimensions of forgiveness (benevolence – MOFS and forgiveness – TFS). BE = benevolence; UN = universalism; TR = tradition; CO = conformity; SE = security; PO = power; AC = achievement; HE = hedonism; ST = stimulation; SD = self-direction.

general. They will also correlate highly and positively with power, achievement, and hedonism, that express human search for social status and success, dominance over people and resources, desire for pleasure and gratification for oneself. Above all, on the basis of the circumplex structure, we assumed that the relations will systematically increase as we go from the most negative related values of benevolence and universalism, or they will systematically decrease as we go from the most positive related values of power, achievement and hedonism. Therefore, we presumed that avoidance, revenge, and unforgiveness will correlate less and negatively with tradition and conformity, both reflecting on respect of the customs and honour showed to parents and elders, and will correlate less and positively with stimulation and self-direction, which express independent thought, novelty, creativity and challenge. We can observe these two specific hypotheses represented graphically as a sinusoid curve in Figure 2.

Besides the hypotheses about associations existing between negative dimensions of forgiveness and values, we also took into consideration the relations between positive dimensions of forgiveness and values. In the case of benevolence (MOFS) and forgiveness (TFS), we deduce that correlation will follow inverted design (Figure 3). Consequently, both will correlate highly and negatively with power, achievement, and hedonism, and they will correlate highly and positively with benevolence (PVQ) and universalism. Moreover, their relations will decrease as we go from the most positive related values of benevolence and universalism (tradition and conformity less positive), or will systematically increase as we go from the most negative related values of power, achievement and hedonism (stimulation and self-direction less negative).

Therefore, in the graphic form, power, achievement, and hedonism would take the place of benevolence (PVQ) and universalism, and vice versa. Likewise, stimulation and self-direction would take the place of tradition and conformity, and vice versa.

Methods

Participants and measures

The research was conducted in Italy and it was carried out among 274 Italian adolescents. The range of age was between 14 to 19 years, with a mean age of 16.38 years (DS=1.539), median and mode of 16 years. The group of participants was predominantly female and included 207 girls (75,5%) and 67 boys (24,5%). Unequal ratio of female to male respondents was due to the fact that the research was performed in three types of high school (liceo) of Central Italy, focusing on Literature and Classical Studies, Modern Languages and Socio-Psycho-Pedagogic Studies, where the large majority of students are female. Besides anagraphic data, we asked the participants about their satisfaction in different areas of life, such as academic accomplishments,

overall well-being, and relational satisfaction in order to gain some information about the general view on their lives. Approximately 15% of the respondents reported being a little satisfied with their academic performance, 32% were “so-so” satisfied, and almost 53% considered themselves very happy with their grades. Other variables showed that of the total sample, 7% of adolescents revealed being not happy in their life, 19% were contented, and 75% expressed great overall life satisfaction. Similar proportions were obtained in regard to relational satisfaction. In fact, 7% were dissatisfied with their relationships, 21% were pleased “so-so”, and 72% declared to be very happy in their relations. All above mentioned kinds of satisfaction were assessed on a 3-point Likert scale consisting of 1 = little satisfied; 2 = so so; and 3 = very satisfied. The results show that the participants in our sample were largely contented with their academics, lives, and relationships.

All the respondents were informed about the general goal of the study, without any specific reference to forgiveness, and were assured that the content of the measures used during the assessment would pose no risk to them. After our explanation and instructions, the students freely expressed a participation agreement.

In order to evaluate forgiveness and personal values, data was collected through a following series of questionnaires: Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-12), The Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS) adapted to the adolescents’ sample, Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS), and Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ). All the respondents received the same set of scales.

The ability to forgive was assessed by The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM-12) developed by Michael E. McCullough and colleagues (1998). Questionnaire is a brief self-report instrument designed to measure the nature of interpersonal forgiving in its two negative dimensions. The first subscale, called ‘avoidance’, contains seven statements and displays the motivation to keep away from the offender (e.g.: “I keep as much distance between us as possible”; “I withdraw from him/her”). In other words, it verifies the extent to which a harmed person evades a transgressor. The second subscale, called ‘revenge’, includes five statements and illustrates the motivation to seek vengeance and impose punishment (e.g.: “I wish that something bad would happen to him/her”; “I want to see him/her hurt and miserable”). The avoidance subscale has a range of 7 to 35, with high scores representing unforgiving motivations to evade a transgressor. Instead, the revenge subscale has a range from 5 to 25 with high scores indicating unforgiving motivations to seek vengeance on the wrongdoer (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Wade Brown, & Hight, 1998). Forgiveness takes place when people renounce avoidance or retaliation toward a wrongdoer (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002; Seligman, 2002; Szcześniak & Soares, 2011). The internal consistency

of the entire scale was very high (Cronbach alpha=0.884). Accordingly, the alpha results of both subscales exceeded 0.8 (Table 1) which indicates that the responses had high reliability (avoidance $\alpha=0.882$ and revenge $\alpha=0.872$). Moreover, factorial analysis supported the two-factor model of the TRIM-12, corresponding to the items chosen by the authors for each subscale (avoidance: 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12; revenge: 1, 3, 6, 9, and 11). The avoidance factor explained 33,7% of the total variance and revenge factor explained 28,4% of the total variance. Answers to 12 items were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The Marital Offence-Specific Forgiveness Scale (MOFS) was the second measure used in this study to assess forgiveness. The scale, originated by F. Giorgia Paleari and colleagues (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2009; 2010; 2011), is a 10-item psychometrically robust questionnaire that calculates marital forgiveness for a specific offence. Because the research was conducted among adolescents, the instruction was modified, and each respondent was asked to remember the most serious transgression, done by her or his close friend, which resulted in negative feelings proved by the participant. The questionnaire contains two dimensions: benevolence and unforgiveness. Benevolence, which includes 4 items (2, 5, 9, 10), describes compassionate and peace-making reactions toward the offender (e.g.: “Since my friend behaved that way, I have done my best to resume our relationship”). Instead, unforgiveness, which consists of 6 remaining items, entails the presence of rancorous and/or avoidant reactions (e.g.: “Because of what happened, I find it difficult to act warmly toward her/him”). Adolescents were asked to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) their degree of forgiveness. The benevolence subscale has a range of 4 to 24, with high scores representing benevolent and conciliatory motivations and the absence of vengeful or withdrawing ones toward the offending friend. Instead, the unforgiveness subscale has a range from 6 to 36 with high scores indicating holding grudges and lasting resentment against the wrongdoing friend (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2009). The coefficient alpha for the whole scale was 0.758. Correspondingly the internal consistency for a factor of benevolence was $\alpha=0.744$, and for a factor of unforgiveness $\alpha=0.652$ (Table 1).

The Trait Forgiveness Scale (TFS) was another instrument used in the present study to assess forgiveness. The scale, designed by Jack W. Berry and collaborators (Berry, Worthington, O’Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005), measures individuals’ predisposition to respond over time and across many situations, in a forgiving way, to transgressions of others. Each of 10 items is rated on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). High scores obtained on the scale correspond to higher trait forgiveness and express agreement of the participant with statements such as, “I

can forgive a friend for almost everything” (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007). The resulting alpha value for the whole scale was 0.625 which indicates sufficient internal consistency (Table 1). The concurrent construct validity of the TFS was supported by its quite good negative correlations with the scores of two dimensions on the TRIM-12 (r coefficient with avoidance = -0.347^{**} and r coefficient with revenge = -0.433^{**}) and positive correlation with benevolence of MOFS (r coefficient = 0.452^{**}) and negative correlation with unforgiveness of MOFS (r coefficient = -0.394^{**}).

It is important to notice that the above mentioned scales were chosen for some explicit reasons. The first motive relates to the fact that three questionnaires differ for the character of forgiveness they measure. For example, while the TRIM-12 represents a bi-dimensional model that assesses negative dimension of forgiving (avoidance and revenge), the TFS allows us to measure inclination to forgive. In contrast, the MOFS consents to evaluate both unforgiveness and forgiveness. Moreover, they diverge from one another for levels of specificity. The TRIM-12 and the TFS are designed to evaluate the lack of disposition to grant forgiveness or a person’s tendency to forgive, and the MOFS is offense-specific measure, where someone forgives a specific offender in the context of a particular, circumscribed interpersonal transgression (McCullough, Hoyt, & Rachal, 2000; Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2009). The third reason derives from our desire to verify if there is any association between trait of forgiveness and offence-specific forgiveness. To our knowledge, some researchers found significant associations between the trait forgiveness and episodic forgiveness (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007), but these associations were obtained in the English speaking contexts, and not in Italian environment. The last, pragmatic motive is that all the scales are very short compared with similar measures and their focus on dimensions of forgiveness are theoretically significant (Sherman & Simonton, 2001).

For measuring personal values, the 40-items version of The Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ) was used. The questionnaire, developed by Shalom H. Schwartz (2007), explores a person’s broad goals or desires. Participants’ own values are deduced from their self-reported resemblance to people’s behaviour, portrayed implicitly in 40 statements. The instrument refers to the Schwartz’ Theory of Values (Schwartz, 2006) that identifies ten types of basic values valid across cultures: achievement (personal accomplishment, competence; e. g.: “Being very successful is important to him. He likes to stand out and to impress other people”); benevolence (caring for and enhancing the well-being of those with whom one is in a close relationship; e. g.: “He always wants to help the people who are close to him. It’s very important to him to care for the people he knows and likes”); conformity (restraint of actions, tendencies, and desires likely to harm others or to violate

social expectations; e. g.: “He believes that people should do what they’re told. He thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no one is watching”); hedonism (being concerned about own pleasure or gratification; e. g.: “He really wants to enjoy life. Having a good time is very important to him”); power (social status, prestige, or control exercised over other people or resources; e. g.: “He likes to be in charge and tell others what to do. He wants people to do what he says”); security (safety, harmony, and stability of self, relationships, and society; e. g.: “The safety of his country is very important to him. He wants his country to be safe from its enemies”); self-direction (autonomous thinking and action; e. g.: “He thinks it’s important to be interested in things. He is curious and tries to understand everything”); stimulation (enthusiasm, originality, and challenge; e. g.: “He looks for adventures and likes to take risks. He wants to have an exciting life”); tradition (respect, commitment, and acceptance of the costumes and ideas that one’s culture or religion impart; e. g.: “He thinks it is important to do things the way he learned from his family. He wants to follow their customs and traditions”); and universalism (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature; e. g.: “He thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. He wants justice for everybody, even for people he doesn’t know”). Extensive list of previous investigations, conducted in different cultural contexts, evidences that the scale has strong reliability (usually around 0.80). Also in the present study, the PVQ demonstrated very good psychometric characteristics. In fact, the value of Cronbach’s alpha was 0.832, suggesting that the questionnaire has high internal consistency. Estimates of reliability computed for 10 subscales revealed scores of α in the 0.545 to 0.760 range (Table 1). Items were rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 6 (very much like me).

All the data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using the SPSS Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Version 18.0 IT). In order to measure the degree of linear relationship between values and forgiveness the standard Pearson correlation formula was applied.

Results

The results summarized in the Table 1, besides reporting means, standard deviations, and the values of Cronbach’s alpha, demonstrate that, similarly to the studies of Okimoto (2012) which did provide evidence in support of the relationship existing between forgiveness or unforgiveness and basic human values, comparable correlations were obtained also in the present study. In fact, outcomes show that difficulty in forgiving is negatively related to self-transcendence and conservation values, and it is positively linked to self-enhancement and openness to change values. The inverse kind of relationship emerges in the case of

Table 1. Value of correlation coefficients between dimensions of forgiveness (first five labels) and values (ten other labels), means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's Alpha (N=274)

	AV	RE	MOFS BE	MOFS UF	FO	BE	UN	TR	CO	SE	PO	AC	HE	ST	SD
Avoidance (AV – TRIM-12)															
Revenge (RE – TRIM-12)	.424**														
Benevolence (MOFS – BE)	-.348**	-.182*													
Unforgiveness (MOFS – UF)	.441**	.383**	-.415**												
Forgiveness (FO – TFS)	-.347**	-.423**	.452**	-.394**											
Benevolence (BE)	-.155*	-.279**	.274**	-.141*	.363**										
Universalism (UN)	-.050	-.156*	.060	-.076	.205**	.422**									
Tradition (TR)	-.102°	-.219**	.132*	-.171**	.292**	.281**	.397**								
Conformity (CO)	-.068	-.115°	.151*	-.116°	.239**	.277**	.396**	.610**							
Security (SE)	-.029	.039	.046	-.031	.051	.127*	.402**	.521**	.384**						
Power (PO)	-.040	.267**	-.084	.066	-.176**	-.061	.066	.192**	.048	.354**					
Achievement (AC)	-.052	.349**	-.015	.037	-.208**	-.225**	-.178**	.011	-.156*	.242**	.582**				
Hedonism (HE)	-.045	.193**	.031	.006	-.042	.099°	-.019	-.080	-.088	.003	.306**	.299**			
Stimulation (ST)	.017	.167**	-.009	.066	-.076	.128*	.202**	-.043	.004	.031	.272**	.147	.480**		
Self-direction (SD)	.053	-.019	-.031	.020	.002	.210**	.326**	-.065	.031	.125*	.197**	.096°	.274**	.417**	
Means	3.57	2.50	3.06	3.82	3.14	4.62	4.45	3.86	4.14	3.94	3.99	2.90	4.57	4.37	
Standard Deviations	.866	.981	1.006	.817	.752	.714	.775	.844	.873	.855	1.012	1.166	.960	.935	
Cronbach's Alpha	.882	.872	.744	.652	.625	.648	.760	.578	.611	.617	.729	.754	.676	.545	

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

° marginal significance (above .05 and no greater than .15)

forgiveness and four dimensions of values mentioned above.

More precisely, we found that revenge, understood as a negative dimension of forgiveness, fits almost perfectly Schwartz's sinusoid pattern. As hypothesized, the correlation for revenge is most negative for benevolence and universalism, and most positive for power and achievement. As we go from the most negatively related values, the coefficient r systematically increases for conformity (marginal significance), with only a slight variation for tradition. Instead, as we go from the most positively related values, the coefficient r regularly decreases for hedonism and stimulation. In line with their order in the specific hypotheses, the correlations for security and self-direction are close to zero. Two other negative dimensions of forgiveness (avoidance and unforgiveness) in part confirmed our hypothesis. Avoidance is negatively associated only with benevolence and tradition (marginal significance) and unforgiveness is negatively linked to benevolence, conformity (marginal significance), and tradition.

Looking at the results from the perspective of forgiveness and not of its lack, we found that benevolence (MOFS) is positively related to value of benevolence (PVQ), conformity, and tradition, following this part of sinusoid pattern that relates to the highest and positive correlations. Such design was not observed in the case of power, achievement, and hedonism which were hypothesized to have the highest and negative correlations with forgiveness. On the other hand, forgiveness (TFS) was correlated with the Schwartz's values as expected. In fact, hypothesis received almost exact support showed through the highest and positive links between forgiveness and benevolence (PVQ), universalism, and conformity, and through the highest and negative associations with power and achievement. Remaining factors (security, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction) present correlations close to zero.

Discussion

In the context of the scarcity of psychological studies about relationship between forgiveness and values, the main purpose of the present study was to verify how the capacity of forgiving, understood as a disposition and as a state, is connected to universally recognized human values. The analysis of the results demonstrates that the measure of revenge procured the strongest evidence for the first hypothesis, showing that tendency to vengeance is negatively correlated with values of benevolence, universalism, conformity, tradition, and positively correlated with values of power, achievement, hedonism, and stimulation. Therefore, as it was assumed, the self-transcendence/conservation values related to responsibility, helpfulness, openness to the needs of others, do not characterize people who retaliate after being harmed by others. Conversely, self-enhancement/openness to change

values which represent power, authority, success, and pleasure seem to portray people who react with revenge.

The results obtained in the current study are consistent with previous findings of other researchers (McKee & Feather, 2008) who have observed not only the positive relation between vengeance attitudes, measured on the 20-item Vengeance Scale by Noreen Stucless and Richard Gorason (1992), and hedonism and power values, but it also came across of the negative relation between vengeance attitudes and the importance of universalism and benevolence values.

Such a configuration of our outcomes seems to demonstrate that adolescents, for whom power values are important and who tend to preserve their status and prestige, try to retaliate when their position is threatened. Thus, "getting even" with the transgressor helps them to repair their reputation and to exercise control over the wrongdoer (McKee & Feather, 2008). Also hedonism, understood as personal pleasure and self-gratification, may reinforce vindictive actions, because theoretically it is often associated with the self-enhancement dimension which motivates people to enhance their individualistic interest (Lowe, 1997), even at the expense of others. Besides, in the present research, vengeance attitudes were strongly correlated with the achievement values. This result does not surprise us if we think that sometimes the pursuit of achievement values may argue with the pursuit of benevolence values and, at other times, may correspond to power values. As Schwartz (2006) states, in the first case, seeking success for self is likely to block actions intended to increase the well-being of others who necessitate one's help, and in the second case it strengthens or it is strengthened by actions aimed at enhancing one's own social status and influence over others.

As expected, opposed to the self-enhancement/openness to change value types, vengeance attitudes were negatively correlated to the self-transcendence/conservation values. In this regard, Ian R. McKee and N. T. Feather (2008) received similar results, showing that participants who supported attitudes toward vengeance tended to de-emphasize values linked to consideration of the welfare of others (benevolence and universalism). This effect provides a comprehensible explanation because, based on the motivational structure of value relations presented by Schwartz's circumplex model, both benevolence and universalism call for promoting the welfare of others, even at cost of the self. In contrast, through vengeance, a victim intends "to inflict harm, damage, discomfort or injury to the party judged responsible" (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001, p. 53), thus expressing own anger, showing resentment, and procuring punishment. Moreover, benevolence/universalism and power/achievement values occupy opposite positions in the circle, indicating that they are presumably in mutual disagreement which may lead to conflicting behaviours in front of transgressions undergone.

Other interesting results concern the positive correlations between revenge and stimulation, and negative correlations between revenge and tradition and conformity (marginal significance). Although revenge was less associated to the value of stimulation respect to achievement, power, and hedonism, its correlation brings a new understanding of the meaning of revenge because the research conducted so far has not procured any evidence in this regard (McKee & Feather, 2008). As Schwartz (1996) notices, stimulation by itself means excitement, novelty, and challenge in a varied and daring life, but stimulation and hedonism both lead to a desire for affectively pleasant arousal. People who believe and follow these values give great importance on pursuing pleasure and sensuous satisfaction for themselves in order to maintain an optimal level of activation (Schwartz, 1992). In this sense, the simultaneous presence of stimulation and hedonism in the situations of revenge may derive from the intention of the victim to restore balance and gain relief by inflicting damage on the transgressor (Wolf-Light, 2005).

Above all, the results also indicate negative association between revenge and tradition, which refers to the respect of the religious and cultural customs. Our findings are supported by little existing research of the relation between religiousness and retaliation. In fact, Tammy Greer and colleagues observed (2005) that intrinsic religious orientation was negatively related to self-reports of vengeance whereas extrinsic religious orientations were positively related to such self-reports. This means, that people who fully embrace a religious belief and fully internalize it are less retaliatory than those who are disposed to the use of religion for their own needs. In another study, Mark M. Leach and collaborators (2008) found that individuals who live their faith are less likely to respond vengefully than extrinsically oriented individuals, if placed in a potential condition of violence.

It is interesting to note that, contrary to the expectations, avoidance as a negative dimension of forgiveness has shown weak relationships with all the Schwartz's values, except benevolence. Other correlational studies also revealed that avoidance, in comparison with revenge, presents less significant correlations with positive affectivity, negative affectivity, self-deception, impression management (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Wade Brown, & Hight, 1998), and dimensions of hope (Szcześniak & Soares, 2011). Another explanation of this result could be related to a cultural aspect of withdrawal. As some researchers underline, while individualistic cultures rarely use avoidance as a satisfactory solution of conflicts, more collectivistic cultures promote the avoidance in order to maintain harmony (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2009). In central regions of Italy, that can be considered more individualistic than collectivistic (Knight & Nisbett, 2007) and where the research was conducted, withdrawal may do not reflect behavioural reaction to

transgressions and thus may not show a relationship with socially recognized values.

Another aspect worthy of mentioning concerns the measure of unforgiveness (MOFS) which illustrates partially comparable results to those of revenge. We found that incapacity to forgive in a specific circumstance was negatively correlated to values of benevolence, tradition, and conformity (marginal significance). Instead, there were no significant positive correlations with self-enhancement and openness to change values. While the presence of negative associations is comprehensible and consistent with the hypothesis, the lack of positive relations may, at first sight, be somewhat intriguing. However, such outcomes may also indicate that unforgiveness, showed in a specific situation within the context of close relationship, encloses different determinants than forgiveness, considered as a trait which is closely related to values. In this regard, Frank D. Fincham and colleagues (2005) deduced the fact that the disposition to forgive demonstrated, for example, to a stranger may not apply to forgiveness in a precise condition given to a friend because they both have different antecedents, correlates, and effects. In practise this could mean that forgiving someone close is more linked to relational determinants than to those that are related to self-enhancement values.

The analysis shows that the result obtained in our study tends to support the second hypothesis as well. In fact, we found that forgiveness (TFS) is correlated highly and positively with benevolence (PVQ), universalism, tradition, and conformity, and it is highly and negatively associated with power and achievement. Moreover, we learnt that benevolence (MOFS) correlates positively with benevolence (PVQ), conformity and tradition, without any significant negative correlation to other values.

The results replicate the outcomes by Okimoto et al. (2012) which are the only empirical results that we found with regard to relation between forgiveness and Schwartz's values. As authors underline, preference for a restorative orientation predicts willingness to forgive, apology-seeking, respect, reduced offender punishment and humiliation. All those features are typical to persons who value others "per se", that is, respect for who they are and not only for what they have or do. In this sense, restorative behaviour reflects other-centered values which, according to Schwartz (2007), comprise universalism, benevolence, conformity, and tradition. On the other hand, a retributive preference predicts desire for revenge, offender punishment, disrespect, refusal to forgive. These characteristics portray persons who look at others through the lens of what wrong they have done. Therefore, retributive motivation is more connected to ego-centered values that are a sign of self-serving and self-gratifying attitudes, such as power and achievement.

Another key for understanding our outcomes is the intrapersonal nonviolence. For example, Rachel M. Hossner and colleagues (2004), found that physical

and psychical forms of nonviolence, measured among adolescents and college students, were positively correlated with benevolence, universalism, and conformity values and negatively correlated with power and hedonism. If we think that the quintessence of being nonviolent and peaceful consists in expressing one's own just ideas, not hurting others and not depriving them of their life (Kumar, 2008), then, we may presume that the reasons behind someone's respectful choice, even towards serious transgressors, stay in her or his capacity to forgive. A person who does not look for revenge and retaliation is, at the same time, more benevolent and caring for the welfare of others, and less inclined to harm them. Moreover, those who are involved in nonviolent conduct, are less engaged in aggressive behaviour, have greater control of frustration, are in fewer conflicts with others, use more appropriate tactics to resolve their problems, are less likely to anger and to be upset in their relationships than individuals who are not involved in nonviolent conduct (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001). For that reason, the qualities which describe peaceful people are all related to relational capacities that characterize self-transcendence and conformity values.

Some other quantitative studies, related specifically to personality traits and prosocial openness, confirm our results as well, although indirectly. For instance, individuals that are easy to be in agreement with others, are more likely to forgive others, thereby possibly leading to higher rates of repair in relationships (Ashton & Lee, 2001; Brose, Rye, Lutz-Zois, & Rossa, 2005; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; Habashi & Graziano, 2009; Mullet, Neto, & Rivière, 2005). Such an association, by analogy, allows us to deduce a positive relationship also between forgiveness and benevolence, because it has revealed a positive correlations between agreeableness and the value of benevolence (de Haan, Deković, & Prinzie, 2012; Van der Zee & Perugini, 2006). In fact, both, being agreeable and benevolent, have in common a positive orientation toward others and prosocial motivation that consists in the desire to benefit and promote the well-being of other people (Grant & Berg, 2011).

Finally, the outcomes of the present study may be discussed in the light of other psychological investigations, especially those which deal with the topic of self-construal, that is, one's perception of self as either independent or interdependent (Chakrabarty & Woodman, 2009). D. Ramona Bobocel and Agnes Zdaniuk (2010), conducting regression analyses to examine connection between self-construal and variables of revenge and forgiveness, observed that there was a significant positive relationship between independent identity and desire for vengeance, and positive relationship between interdependent self-construal and forgiveness. In practice, this means that persons who place a greater importance on the self rather than on the relationship (independent self-construal) are more predisposed to retaliate while looking for justice. In contrast, persons who

feel connected to others and place greater value on the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours of others involved in the relationship (interdependent self-construal), are more willing to forgive their offenders. Such results prove that forgiveness characterizes more people with interpersonal and relational capacities than those who concentrate their attention on success and their personal needs.

Analysis of the results in relationship to both hypotheses shows that, although different measures have been used to investigate forgiveness; outcomes are coherent between each other. Such consistency allows us to assume that independent of the character of forgiveness (positive and negative dimensions) and its levels of specificity (trait forgiveness and episodic forgiveness), the capacity of forgiving is much more related to self-transcendence and conservation values than self-enhancement and openness to change values.

From the above research that was carried out, a lot has been achieved and it has also come to our attention that the study has presented several limitations. The first regards the sample composition (number of males and females). The reason that was given out is that the research was conducted in three types of high school, with the profile typically feminine. Therefore such a structure of the group could have some influence on the findings and it does not allow us to predict of more wide-ranging behavioural patterns. Moreover, the evaluation of forgiveness and values were performed through self-report questionnaires that greatly rely on the participants to provide sincere and unbiased responses.

Despite the above mentioned limitations, the present study shows that the pattern of results is consistent with the findings of some previous studies on forgiveness and values (McKee & Feather, 2008; Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2012), and clearly verifies the theoretical intuition of Michael E. McCullough about "careworthiness", which is considered as one of the most important psychological conditions which motivate the forgiveness. In fact, besides the different antecedents of willingness to forgive which is identified in the earlier analyses and mentioned both in the introductory part and discussion section of this paper, we found self-transcendence/conformity values as closely related to forgiveness. Such a relationship means that we are more able to renounce revenge when we express profound and genuine concern for other people than when we demonstrate apprehension only about our own interests (self-enhancement/openness to change). Therefore, it seems that capacity to forgive is not an impossibility to reach to the ideal, but rather it is the foremost gift that builds ourselves and our interpersonal relationships.

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