Do Catholics have an external locus of evaluation?
Inauthentic experiences of Catholic guilt in the pursuit of self-forgiveness.

Abstract

This two-part mixed methods study investigated emotional response to transgression and self-forgiveness in Catholic individuals in concert with locus of evaluation orientation following a hypothesis that Catholics may be particularly unable to find self-forgiveness in the teachings of their religion. Study 1 was a qualitative semi-structured interview with a sample of 20 practicing Catholic participants. Questions focused on the emotive experiences of self-forgiveness and transgressions and the contribution that Catholic practices (prayer and reconciliation) make to the process. Data were analysed using thematic analysis which supported evidence of Catholic guilt but suggested that there may be some inauthenticity and insincerity with which penitents' approach reconciliatory practices. Study 2 used a sample of 239 Christian participants in groups of Catholics and Christian non-Catholics. Participants responded to two psychometric questionnaires: the Heartland Forgiveness Scale, and the Locus of Evaluation Inventory. Followed by two additional questions pertaining to self-forgiveness experiences, and one question requiring participants to prioritise types of forgiveness. The results found no difference between Catholics and non-Catholics in their response to self-forgiveness or locus of evaluation orientation. However, in non-Catholic Christians but not in Catholics, the frequency of religious practice correlated with higher total forgiveness and its subscales (including self-forgiveness), with more internal locus of evaluation, and with lower self-regard, suggesting that church attendance does not relate to the propensity for self-forgiveness in Catholic individuals.

The Psychology of Forgiveness

> "There is nothing that cannot be forgiven. There is no-one undeserving of forgiveness." (Tutu, 2015, p. 2)

The Cambridge English Dictionary (2018) defines forgiveness as the ending of a feeling of anger towards a transgressor or further, allowing a person not to have to pay back a debt. As such it can be said to have both affective and cognitive characteristics. The late Archbishop Desmond Tutu described forgiveness as "the capacity to make a new start and the grace by which we enable the other person to get up and get up with dignity to begin anew," (Tutu, 2015, p. 2) suggesting that it involves a decisional motivation towards reparation, behaviour modification, and the extolling of compassion towards one's offender. Indeed, forgiveness is often presented metaphorically as an act of letting go of a transgression (pertaining to the letting go of negative emotion or the right to retaliation or revenge), or the act of releasing a prisoner (the offender) from one's prison (their offence). Yet, there exists an implicit paradox within these metaphors: that in letting go, or setting free one's transgressor, the victim of these transgressions may also be set free from their own cognitive, affective and behavioural responses. Thus, forgiveness may involve both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (Gordon & Baucom, 1998).

Indeed, although forgiveness is often considered following an interpersonal transgression, it may be conceptualised as intraindividual in essence since forgiveness occurs introspectively within the victim of the offence. Furthermore, Aquino, Tripp and Bies (2006) argue that forgiveness is not necessarily dependent upon dialogue or interaction with one's offender. Often, forgiveness is presented as a form of reconciliation involving the restoration of the relationship between the two parties: offender and victim. Yet, although reconciliation may be the preferred outcome of forgiveness (Strabbing, 2020), the extension of forgiveness may not infer that the victim is inclined to reconcile with the offender (Freedman, 1998).

Definitions of forgiveness have included a variety of distinct phenomena including affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses following a transgression (McCullough, et al., 2002, 2007, 2012). Affective forgiveness may refer to the transformation that occurs within the victim of an offence involving the release of negative emotion (Acquino, et al., 2006) and the consequential increase in positive emotion (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini & Miller, 2007) towards an offender. In comparison to this affective approach to forgiveness, McCullough, Bono and Root (2007) propose a decisional process of forgiveness involving the reduction in revenge and avoidance along with an intentional increase in beneficent thoughts towards one's transgressor. Furthermore, a cognitive and behavioural act of forgiveness might involve "committing to apply energy and effort to regulate negative emotions, thoughts and behaviours until unforgiving emotions are substantially reduced" (Davis, Hook, Griffin, Bell, Van Tongeren & Westbrook, 2015, p. 281). Thus, there exists a great degree of divergence in definitions of what forgiveness might entail.

Some researchers recognise that more than one of these processes might be implied in the pursuit and achievement of forgiveness. Worthington and Scherer (2004) suggest that forgiveness involves both the decrease in negative emotional affect and the replacement of destructive attitudes including anger and revenge in favour of reparative attitudes including compassion and patience (Sampaz, Yildirium, Topcuoglu, Nalbant & Sizir, 2016). Thus, the pursuit of forgiveness might involve a process of emotional and cognitive chronological phases which victims and perpetrators alike must navigate to reach a state of repair (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015).

Denton and Martin (2007) argue that the phenomenon of forgiveness is often confused with other constructs which are experienced prior to or consequential of forgiveness itself including reconciliation (Strabbing, 2017) or apology (Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama & Shirvani, 2008). Indeed, it may be easier to understand forgiveness by what it

does not include: pardoning, condoning, or excusing an offence, nor is it the intention for reconciliation since these behaviours describe the restoration of trust within a relationship rather than the experience of forgiveness itself (Kim & Enright, 2015).

Instead, forgiveness may be expressed as a prosocial change in a victim towards their offender involving either the relinquishment of any negative judgment and emotion (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014; Toussaint, Owen & Cheadle, 2012) or/and the exchange of negative emotion in favour of empathy and acceptance (Johnson, Wernli, & LaVoie, 2013). Thompson, Snyder, Hoffman, Michael, Rasmussen, Billings and Roberts (2005), propose that forgiveness involves the reassessment and cognitive reconstruction of an offence to modify one's negative affective response and replace it with a positive or neutral one.

Some researchers support the idea that forgiveness may be offered to absolve perpetrators of their emotionally wounding behaviours (Umbreit, Vos, Coates & Brown, 2003) suggesting that it might have unhelpful characteristics. However, others have argued that it should not result in disregarding an offence or injustice in which one's emotional welfare is compromised (Riek & Mania, 2011). Indeed, Smedes (1984) asserts that it may be unrealistic for victims to be expected to relinquish feelings of anger following a transgression. Instead, the victim may need to explore and understand their feelings of anger before allowing them to dissipate. Indeed, for forgiveness to be constructive it needs to be framed in such a way as to acknowledge the extent of one's injury without excusing or condoning the behaviour that caused it (Fisher & Exline, 2007), as Archbishop Desmond Tutu says:

> "Forgiveness means that the wronged and the culprits of those wrongs acknowledge that something happened. And there is necessarily a measure of confrontation. People sometimes think that you shouldn't be abrasive but sometimes you have to make

someone acknowledge that they have done something wrong." (Tutu, 2015. As cited in Hendry, Huggins, Kempster & McCallum, 2021).

Yet, accepting and acknowledging the wrong of a transgressor is quite different from the experiencing of positive emotions towards them. In research on interpersonal forgiveness there continues to be debate as to whether individuals can forgive in the absence of positive or neutral emotions towards one's perpetrator (Freedman & Zarifkar, 2016). In fact, to experience only an increase in positive emotion following an offence may be unrealistic (Smedes, 1984). However, the act of working towards forgiveness may provide an opportunity to reduce resentment and anger and pave the way for a benevolent view of one's transgressor.

Thus, it appears that forgiveness is not necessarily an easy pursuit. It is likely to feel confronting and distressing for both the forgiver and the forgiven. Forgiving others or oneself superficially may feel a more favourable choice than the painful and often uncomfortable work involved in remedy and reconciliation (Devries & Schott, 2015). However, research shows that when one holds both themselves and others to account for their misdemeanours it can lead to greater introspection and prosocial behaviours (Bast & Barnes-Holmes, 2014) which create the foundations for meaningful change. Indeed, it has been observed that the conscious acknowledgement of a transgression along with the acceptance of the anger one feels are essential strides towards the decisional proclivity to forgive (Umbreit, Blevins & Lewis, 2015).

Forgiveness has thus far been discussed in terms of its overall psychology however, it is often compartmentalised into four conceptually distinct but arguably interconnected subcategories including self-forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness, divine forgiveness, and situational forgiveness. Research has shown that one's ability to experience, extend and receive forgiveness in one of these areas may positively influence one's proclivity to forgive

in another. Thus, although each type of forgiveness has been explored in isolation as a separate mechanism (Krause & Hayward, 2015) there may be some parallels between interpersonal forgiveness and self-forgiveness responses.

Thompson, et al. (2005) found that self-forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness are strongly correlated with each other. Furthermore, longitudinal research has found that divine forgiveness may be a predictor of self-forgiveness and of interpersonal forgiveness (Fincham & May 2019).

Enright and Fitzgibbons (2015) propose that interpersonal forgiveness involves a process of four distinct stages. The first, named 'the uncovering phase', describes the acknowledgement and willingness to reflect upon the impact of the transgression upon one's wellbeing. This 'uncovering' makes way for the non-judgemental experiencing of painful and difficult emotions (Freedman & Zarifkar, 2016) which facilitates a clear and unobstructed view of the transgressional event. The second stage, called 'the decision phase', involves the conscious decision towards forgiveness as opposed to rumination or retaliation. However, this decision does not negate culpability nor the right to justice (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). For this stage to be conquered one must choose to forgive because one believes it to be a worthy and beneficial goal, rather than consequential of obligation or minimisation of wrongs (Ilbay & Saricam, 2015). The third stage describes the 'work phase' and denotes the cognitive process of experiencing empathy towards one's perpetrator to understand the motivation for their offence. This requirement for the extension of compassion in conjunction with a willingness to acknowledge the offender's inherent goodness requires the individual to understand their offender without judgement (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). This process is likely to heighten the experience of one's difficult emotions and it is important that the individual can hold them without projecting or displacing them onto others (Menahem & Love, 2013). Indeed, this phase requires emotional regulation in the face of an injustice or

wrong and as such, is the most challenging, yet essential, stage (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). The final stage named 'the deepening phase' entails the culmination of all previous stages which pave the way for motivational shifts in cognitive and affective responses towards the perpetrator. The ability to acknowledge others as good but imperfect allows for reconnection, restoration, and the stabilisation of emotion (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015) providing that one does not continue to feel threatened by the offender. This model has been demonstrated to be effective in exploring the phenomenon of self-forgiveness too, and thus may be valuable to consider when exploring Catholic individual's' descriptions of their responses to transgression.

In sum, forgiveness means different things to different people, and it is likely to incorporate a range of disparate affective, cognitive, and behavioural phenomena. Researchers have challenged the necessity for a universal definition of the phenomenon, and offered a variety of complex models, sometimes arguing that the establishing concrete parameters of what it might entail would deny diversity of phenomenological experience (Legaree, Turner & Lollis, 2007). It is important to recognise that forgiveness is not the same as the restoration or repair of a relationship since forgiveness does not require the continued relationship with one's offender (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Yet, this may have important implications for the phenomenon of self-forgiveness, whereby the relationship with oneself as both offender and victim cannot be separated, moreover, it is the experience of self-forgiveness that is the focus of this study.

The psychology of Self-Forgiveness

> "But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself – that these

> are within me, and that I, myself stand in need of the aims of my own kindness. That I, myself am an enemy who must be loved – what then? As a rule, the Christian's attitude is then reversed; there is no longer any question of love or long-suffering; we say to the brother within us 'raca' (worthless) and condemn and rage against ourselves. We hide it from the world; we refuse to admit ever having met this least among the lowly in ourselves." (Jung, 1969)

Enright and the Human Study Group (1996) define self-forgiveness as "the willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's objective wrong whilst fostering compassion, generosity and love towards oneself" (p. 116). Lay understandings of self-forgiveness might involve an act of self-love through self-acceptance, self-compassion, and acknowledgement of wrong. It is often presented metaphorically as the act of setting oneself free. Indeed, existing definitions include: the substitution of self-punishment in favour of self-benevolence (Hall & Fincham, 2005), the release of self-resentment and restoration of self-value (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015) and the process by which negatively self-directed emotions such as shame are reduced in favour of self-acceptance (Fisher & Exline, 2010).

Self-forgiveness differs from other types of forgiveness at a rudimentary level because the extension of forgiveness is both offered and received by the same person suggesting an intraindividual response. Vitz and Meade (2011) argue that the term *self-forgiveness* is erroneous and misleading because it a suggests a psychological splitting of oneself into both perpetrator and victim which, in their opinion, may impede psychological well-being. A psychodynamic approach such as that presented in the section-heading quotation by Jung demonstrates a similar juxtaposition whereby the healing of a split between one's moral and real self requires individuation: the process of reintegration of the shadow, or unacceptable aspects of oneself, through the confrontation of one's dystonic-ego (the aspects

of self or behaviour that contradict one's values and self-image) in order to achieve ego-syntonicity (aspects of behaviour that are compatible with one's values and self-beliefs).

Research shows that self-forgiveness has unique outcomes compared to other types of forgiveness including a decrease in feelings of hopelessness and depression (Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson-Rose, 2008), anxiety (Thompson, et al., 2005), and suicidal ideation (Cleare, Gumley, & O'Connor, 2019). Furthermore, it has been found to increase life satisfaction (Kinga & Mroz, 2018).

Woodyatt and Wenzel (2013) argue that the phenomenon of self-forgiveness may be understood from a *tripartite* position which recognises three potential responses in transgressors following an offence: 1) Genuine self-forgiveness, 2) Pseudo self-forgiveness, and 3) Self-punitiveness. In their research they argue that genuine self-forgiveness is achieved over time where the transgressor acknowledges and accepts responsibility for their offence (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014) to re-establish their positive self-image and self-acceptance (Worthington & Langberg, 2012) and maintain their motivation for reparative change. In contrast, self-punitiveness involves the internalisation of shame and guilt following one's wrongdoing and the motivation for self-degradation and devaluation (Costa, Worthington, Montanha, Couto, & Cunha, 2021). Woodyatt and Wenzel (2013) make an important distinction here that despite the self-punitive individual experiencing (possibly) appropriate emotion and responsibility for their offence, they lack the proclivity for meaningful change thus inhibiting genuine self-forgiveness. The third response, pseudo self-forgiveness, presents an opposing position to that of self-punitiveness. In this response, offenders are argued to diminish the extent of the harm caused through denial or victim-blaming to catapult themselves towards the faster release of guilt or shame (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013).

More recently, Woodyatt, Wenzel and Ferber (2017) have argued that the process of self-forgiveness involves both hedonic (the pursuit of pleasant or positive affect) and eudaimonic (the pursuit of meaning and purpose in the process of working through difficult emotions and experiences) components. This is supported by Cornish and Wade's (2015) process model, the four R's of self-forgiveness: responsibility, remorse, restoration and renewal, which implies that self-forgiveness has hedonic outcomes in concert with eudaimonic processes (the model is covered in more depth later).

Self-forgiveness and self-compassion are distinct yet intersecting constructs. Costa and colleagues (2015), describe self-compassion as the recognition of suffering within oneself and others with a dedication to try and alleviate it. Self-compassion therefore involves the extension of non-judgemental care towards one's own internal suffering. As such, Neff (2022) suggests that it involves three properties: self-kindness (as opposed to self-judgement or criticism), common humanity (perceiving one's experience as intersubjectively linked to other human experience rather than in isolation) and mindfulness (holding one's feelings in the present moment of awareness without attempting to interpret). Furthermore, practicing self-compassion in the wake of a transgression may enable a transgressor to confront difficult or uncomfortable thoughts and emotions that are elicited in response to their wrongdoings (Neff, 2022) and pave the way for both the hedonic and eudaimonic functions of genuine self-forgiveness. Indeed, self-compassion has been found to reduce individual internalisation of perceived failure in favour of acceptance and warmth (Breines & Chen, 2013) resulting in a decreased propensity for avoidance and defensiveness, two mechanisms which prevent the transgressor from acknowledging culpability and motivation for change.

Maynard, van Kessel and Feather (2022) assert that the propensity for self-forgiveness is increased with one's capacity for self-compassion along with diminished self-condemnation which enables transgressors to depersonalise their internal experience of an

offence and in turn, understand the context in which it occurred. This is supported by the research of Cornish and Wade (2015) whose longitudinal research using Emotion Focussed Therapy with transgressors over an eight-week counselling programme demonstrated improved self-compassion and self-forgiveness experiences over time and significantly reduced self-condemnation and negative self-affect.

However, whilst strategies such as compassion focussed therapies have been found to decrease negative self-affect in transgressors, they do not necessarily improve the propensity for genuine self-forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). In fact, Fisher (2007) found that therapeutic techniques that aim to reduce self-punitiveness were also found to impair individuals' experiences of remorse and responsibility, which are argued to be fundamental to genuine self-forgiveness (Cornish & Wade, 2015). Indeed, research suggests that it is the process of working through an offence in conjunction with a willingness for introspection and a commitment to change that improves the propensity for self-forgiveness and the avoidance of pathology (Wohl, Salmon, Hollingshead, Lidstone, & Tabri, 2017). Arguably, self-forgiveness is not possible in the absence of remorse. Instead, the transgressor must intend to atone for their wrongdoing and seek authentic reparation (Proeve & Tudor, 2016).

Thus, although self-forgiveness may be argued to facilitate reparative change in transgressors' attitudes towards themselves and others, arriving at the endpoint of self-forgiveness through the release of self-punishment alone may impede the process (Exline, Root, Yadavalli, Martin, & Fisher, 2011; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013) and furthermore, may be tantamount to escaping culpability (Wenzel, Woodyatt, & Hendrick, 2012).

In contrast, those who have experienced self-forgiveness have been found to allocate less self-blame in the wake of their objective wrongs and were more likely to adopt positive responses and self-compassion (Maltby, Maccaskill, & Day, 2001; Mauger, Perry, Freeman,

Grove, McBride, & McKinney, 1992; Strelan, 2017) compared with their non-self-forgiving counterparts.

Therefore, whilst it is perhaps preferable for transgressors to employ a hedonic approach which favours the experience and increase of positive-affect through self-compassion and self-acceptance strategies following a transgression, negative-affect is an important part of the process of self-forgiveness too. When individuals reach an awareness that their actions have caused suffering to others or themselves it is likely (and appropriate) that they will experience self-punishment, guilt, and shame too (de Vel-Palumbo, Woodyatt, & Wenzel, 2018). Although self-condemnation is associated with depression, anxiety, and demotivation (Worthington, 2007), these negative emotional responses can also be a valuable signal that one has transgressed leading to prosocial action and motivation for repair (Nelissen, Breugelmans, & Zeelenberg. 2013). Thus, self-forgiveness may also have anti-hedonic functions too whereby the goal of the phenomenon is not to achieve positive affect or contentment, but instead to achieve moral growth and learning consequential of the challenges faced both in the experience of negative emotion and the violation of one's values.

The research of Inbar, Pizarro, Gilovich and Ariely (2012) found that individuals who were experiencing guilt were more self-punitive than those who expressed neutral emotions. In their experiment guilty individuals held their hand in iced water significantly longer than other participants and subsequently reported a decrease in their experiences of guilt. Thus, the act of self-punishment in the awareness of one's transgression may be argued to demonstrate a commitment to a transgressor's' moral values and portray a reduction in their status to other group members (de Vel-Palumbo, Wenzel, & Woodyatt, 2019). Furthermore, the experience of remorse in conjunction with conciliatory response has also been found to improve self-forgiveness outcomes (Fisher & Exline, 2007).

A eudaimonic approach to self-forgiveness requires that the individual confront the reality of their objective wrong, demonstrate a commitment to abstain from wrongdoing in future, and make efforts to change (Enright, et al., 1996). This is rooted in the reality that uncomfortable tasks are sometimes required to accomplish psychological wellbeing (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Conversely, if transgressors minimise the objective harm in their haste for self-repair their motivation for pro-social change has been found to be significantly reduced resulting in moral disengagement whereby individuals experience a reduction in negative affect whilst negating pro-social work (Wohl & Thompson, 2011). If guilt therefore is a pro-social factor in the propensity for self-forgiveness it might suggest that the widely acknowledged phenomenon of Catholic guilt, which pertains to the tendency for Catholics to experience a disproportionate degree of guilt for sins both real and inconsequential (discussed later in this section), may support the process of self-forgiveness in Catholics.

Cornish and Wade (2015) apply their understanding of self-forgiveness involving four R's (responsibility, remorse, restoration, and renewal) to self-forgiveness. They suggest that remorse in self-forgiveness involves the working through of shame, since shame involves negative self-appraisal which may lead to avoidance if resolution is seen as impossible (Leach & Cidam, 2015). The process of working through allows the transgressor to transform the shame into guilt whereby they can then assess the severity of the offence itself and the objective harm caused and thus, increase the propensity for conciliation and reparation (Fisher & Exline, 2007). Restoration is a more dynamic process involving the requirement for the individual to take action to make reparations and to recommit to the values that were violated in their offence. This active stage is important because learning and understanding how and why an offence was committed allows the individual to take preventative steps to avoid reoffending. The final stage, renewal allows the individual to unburden themselves of their self-punishment whilst maintaining and assimilating the knowledge and learning

gleaned through the previous stages (Cornish & Wade, 2015). This process model suggests that both hedonic and eudaimonic processes are involved in genuine self-forgiveness. Furthermore, it recognises the importance of both intrapersonal and interpersonal responses following a transgression, particularly where it might threaten one's need for group-belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Griffin, Cornish, Maguen and Worthington (In Drescher, Nieuwsma, 2021. pp. 71-86) assert that self-forgiveness provides "a framework by which to satisfy fundamental needs for belonging and esteem that moral pain often obstructs." Indeed, research shows that individuals want to be perceived as moral and good (Boegershausen, Aquino, & Reed, 2015) and as Woodyatt, Wenzel and Ferber (2017) assert: "standards of goodness or morality are defined by the social group or community to which one feels a sense of identification, and adherence to these standards has implications for the social-self" (p. 519). Furthermore, social relationships have been found to be fundamental to wellbeing (Kansky, 2017) along with the need to feel a sense of social connectedness and interpersonal closeness (Lee, Draper & Lee, 2001) as a dimension of belonging (Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). Thus, it is likely that when one transgresses in way that contravenes the social values and attitudes of the group to which one belongs, a reparative function of working through will be necessary to reaffirm one's commitment to the values that there were violated in the offence (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2017). When transgressors can confront their misdeeds and move towards authentic value-based modification of their behaviour which aligns with the social-group's' values it may enhance the propensity for self-forgiveness.

Woodyatt and Wenzel (2017) highlight that value-affirmation is needed before self-compassion, since it allows the transgressor to appraise their offence without defensiveness and thus acknowledge culpability. They suggest that it is only after this that self-compassion is appropriate to lessen the transgressors experience of shame.

Pierro, Pica, Giannini, Higgins and Kruglanski (2018) present a dynamic and active approach to self-forgiveness in their psychological motion theory which posits that self-forgiveness requires the desire to move from one psychological state to another (called 'motion') along with the concern for self-evaluation. This solution-focussed and present-moment approach argues that when individuals ruminate on their transgressions from the lens of the past it maintains the focus on their wrongdoing which consequentially inhibits self-forgiveness (Pierro, Pica, Dentale, Gelfand, and Kruglanski, 2020). This argument may be better supported by other research which has found positive correlations between cognitive flexibility (Thompson, et al., 2005) and self-forgiveness. Also, in line with the need for motion, perfectionism and rumination are phenomena that maintain a self-critical mindset and also inhibit self-forgiveness (Dixon, Earl, Lutz-Zois, Goodnight, & Peatee, 2014).

Thus, self-forgiveness, or its absence, is not always appropriate. If a situation does not require self-forgiveness, such as, unintentional injury (Post, Cornish, Wade, & Tucker, 2013) then attempting to self-forgive is likely to be experienced as self-punitive since there may be no opportunity for change (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). This may be important in exploring the interface between religious practice and self-forgiveness since many Catholic followers may unintentionally fall short of the mark in achieving the ideals of their faith. In contrast, one may also fail to accept responsibility for an offence, or diminish the objective wrong caused providing transgressors with a "moral, cognitive and affective shortcut" (Tangney, Boone & Dearing. 2005, p. 145) in which one may circumvent appropriate moral emotions such as guilt. Yet, if one does not take reparative action or responsibility, then self-forgiveness is unlikely to remain long-lasting (Hall & Fincham, 2005).

In sum, self-forgiveness has been analysed as involving the reduction of negative self-affect (including self-punishment and devaluation) in favour of positive-self affect (including

self-compassion and acceptance) following a transgression (Hall & Fincham, 2005). All the same, negative moral emotions including shame and guilt appear to play an important part in the process of self-forgiveness in allowing transgressors to move from shame to guilt which enables them to perceive their transgression more objectively (Cornish & Wade, 2015). When negative self-affect is reduced, it can inhibit feelings of remorse and responsibility that are important factors of self-forgiveness (Cornish & Wade, 2015). Conversely, over-scrutinising an offence may inhibit self-forgiveness too (Dixon, et al., 2014). Self-forgiveness has been found to require introspection in conjunction with responsibility, remorse, restoration, and renewal (Cornish & Wade, 2015) and a requirement to reaffirm a commitment to the values that were violated by one's transgression (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2017).

Indeed, the phenomenon of self-forgiveness is multi-faceted and complex, thus, it can be difficult to be sure that the phenomenon captured in any given research study is that of self-forgiveness itself and not the many other phenomena that may contribute to it. This provides an important rationale for the qualitative approach of the first study in this research in facilitating an opportunity for Catholic followers to communicate their own experiential and phenomenological understanding and experiences of self-forgiveness.

Forgiveness in Christianity

"We all need to be forgiven by others, so we must be ready to forgive. Asking and granting forgiveness is something profoundly worthy of every one of us." (Pope John Paul II, 2002).

Religious authorities and scholars have underscored the importance of understanding experiences of contrition in the psychology of faith. Pope John Paul II (2002) recognised that the practice of prayer and absolution involved the amalgamation of multiple disciplines such

as psychology and sociology to understand followers' religious motivation. This is re-enforced by Dallen (1991) who questioned whether it was possible to theologise about contrition and penance without understanding how followers may experience it. As such, gaining insight into emotional experiences of Catholic transgression will be valuable in understanding how these emotions might influence the propensity for self-forgiveness in Catholic followers.

The concept of forgiveness is well supported within Christian Biblical scripture. Enright and the Human Development Study Group (1991) reported the regular use of four Greek words within the Bible used contextually to describe characteristics of the forgiveness phenomenon. The first, *aphiemi*, translates to the driving away of sin, the second, *charizomai*, describes the bestowal of unconditional favour, the third, *apoluo* describes the discharge of negative emotion, and the fourth, *agape* describes an unconditional and compassionate love. These Greek concepts draw parallel with some aspects of the process models of forgiveness and self-forgiveness. For example, Enright and Fitzgibbons' (2015) four stage model describes an 'uncovering' stage which might be akin to the discharge of negative emotions characterised by *apuluo,* and the 'decisional' and 'work' phases of the Enright model might be seen to have similarities with the concept of *aphiemi* in the driving away of sin in conjunction with the commitment to change. The final 'deepening' stage may be expressed by *charizomai* in the unconditional favour and acknowledgement of oneself or another as inevitably fallible. The final concept, *agape* may be a more difficult state to achieve in the requirement for unconditional love and compassion, yet this could be argued to be a fundamental characteristic of self-forgiveness. In Christianity, *agape* is proposed to be bestowed from God and may be considered beyond human capability. Jesus' sacrifice is the model of forgiveness for humankind with prayer and ritual as transcendental coping mechanisms that support decisional forgiveness (Pargament & Rye, 2009).

Thus, ecumenical practice of forgiveness is built upon the conceptual foundations of God's ability and willingness to cleanse followers of their sins following repentance and a consequential feeling of unconditional love and acceptance (Enright, Gassin, & Wu, 1992). Yet, from a Biblical perspective, it is consequential of one's relationship to, and with others and thus might be difficult to achieve from an intrapersonal standpoint.

A popular conceptualisation of forgiveness in Christianity comes from Sande's (2004) description of horizontal and vertical forgiveness. Where horizontal forgiveness pertains to the necessity to forgive one another, especially those who have asked for forgiveness, vertical forgiveness is derived from God alone. The primacy of vertical forgiveness is well founded within the Bible for example, in the story of David's committing of adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband, Uriah, he is written to have called out to God "against you, and you only, have I sinned" (Psalms 51:4). This does not negate his responsibility for the harm he caused horizontally, but there is a recognition that to offend or sin against God is worse. Furthermore, once David perceived that he had been forgiven by God his sins were absolved:

> "Deliver me from blood guiltiness O God, O God of my salvations, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness." (Psalms 51:14).

This ought to provide sinners with confidence in God's merciful forgiveness since even capital sins are forgiven in this example.

Yet, Christianity teaches followers that suffering is inevitable, a consequence of both original sin and the sins that one willingly commits such as the failure to live according to the moral and biblical standards that one subscribes to (Biddle, 2005). Awareness of sin has been found to result in a state of intrapersonal conflict against one's held values (Zettle, Barner, & Gird, 2009). When an individual falls short of the mark or behaves immorally it is likely that they will experience not just an internal conflict but also a conflict that puts them at odds with

the religious socio-cultural group that they belong to. Indeed, Christianity ascribes to the idea that one can only be transformed when good wins over evil (Freke & Gandy, 2006), yet how one perceives themself may influence this. If a person perceives themselves as bad, self-punishment in the form of religious works or ritual may be used in response.

Tangney and Mashek (2004, pp. 156–166) write about their own personal formative experiences of Christianity and the introjected messages implicitly received during Sunday school and from the homily. Tangney reported experiencing negative moral emotions including shame and guilt during Catholic religious observation which were reinforced by the implicit message that "to be a good person one had to feel bad," similar to the much-commented phenomenon of Catholic guilt. In fact, research has shown that self-conscious emotions are often linked with religion (Diversi & Finley, 2010) with phenomena such as Catholic guilt and Jewish guilt considered to be widely recognised maladaptive behaviours associated with the internalisation of these faiths (Sheldon, 2006) and possible inhibitors of self-forgiveness. Furthermore, shame is well represented within Biblical doctrines, often in response to sin. For example, in Paul's epistle to the Corinthians followers are reminded of their shame and urged to stop sinning:

> "Come back to your sense as you ought and stop sinning. For there are some who are ignorant of God – I say this to your shame." (King James Version, 2017, 1 Cor. 115:34).

Indeed, it could be argued that shame is so enmeshed within Christianity that even the central figure of its teaching, Jesus, suffered the most shame-inducing punishment in His crucifixion (McNish & Dayringer, 2004) that followers might receive salvation. The question arising at the interface of theology and psychology, then, is whether religious emphases on shame and maladaptive guilt can lead to the negative outcomes of these emotions, including inhibiting self-forgiveness identified by psychological research.

Yet, when one feels forgiven by God, they may be more able to forgive themselves (Fincham & May, 2019). Additionally, individual perceptions of God as either forgiving or punitive also impacted the propensity for self-forgiveness. In Christianity self-forgiveness might find support from the concept of God's grace which describes a mercy and compassion extolled by God that cannot be earnt. It could be argued that for Christians not to forgive themselves despite ascription to the notion that "He had Himself purged our sins" (Hebrews 1:3) is equivalent to a rejection of Christ. The concept of grace ought to then free penitents to accept their imperfections and thus reconcile themselves to God even in the wake of a transgression.

Although religion promotes forgiveness as an important doctrine of the faith, and Christian prayer and devotion have been shown to increase the proclivity for interpersonal forgiveness (Vasikiauskas & McMinn, 2013), studies have found no significant difference in the propensity for self-forgiveness in religious populations (Toussaint & Williams, 2008). Some have even found a negative correlation between religiousness and self-forgiveness (Symington, Walker, & Gorsuch, 2002).

This view is supported in other studies which demonstrate that among believers, a belief in divine forgiveness is correlated with self-forgiveness (Krause & Hayward, 2015; McConnell & Dixon, 2012) thus, perhaps the two are enmeshed. Krause and Hayward (2015) found that it was more probable that individuals would forgive themselves if they internalised a belief that they had been forgiven by God. This divine dependency appears to suggest that if self-forgiveness is possible for Catholics, it is only after receipt of divine forgiveness, and not before.

Catholic and Protestant Doctrines as Inhibitors of Self-Forgiveness

To further understand the part that Catholic doctrines and practices play in the actualisation of self-forgiveness we must also understand how they compare to other Christian denominations. Furthermore, a deeper understanding of the Sacramental, ritual, and collective practices of Catholicism is presented to provide an understanding of the religious foundations that Catholic behaviours may be built upon.

The message that penitents have received from the Catholic Church about forgiveness from sin and release from guilt has changed significantly throughout its history. Early Catholic teachings suggested that that release from guilt was consequential only upon one's acceptance of God's unconditional and voluntary offer of release, and the expectation of one to unconditionally forgive others. However, in more recent Catholic teachings release from guilt has become conditional with forgiveness mediated through priests in *persona-Christi* who are perceived to have power from God to release them and are dependent upon the individual enduring penance. This emphasis on sacerdotalism in which the priests are perceived as mediators between God and human is derived from the belief that the clergy are representatives of the apostles. In contrast, Protestants reject sacerdotalism and argue that no intermediary is necessary between man and God, and they suggest that the hierarchical nature of this approach may in contrast counter Biblical teaching. This may lead us to question whether the practices of intermediation improve or reduce the propensity for Catholics to achieve self-forgiveness.

Yet, the Bible provides Holy Scriptures for all Christian believers and thus it might be expected that the consumption of its doctrines might be universally understood, although the influence of one's socio-cultural and contextual setting is likely to also play a part (Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). Indeed, practices of Catholicism has been found to be expressed differently across continents and cultures (Foster & Foster, 2019), moreover, the practice of

Protestantism may include several sub-denominations. Therefore, how one thinks and expresses their faith along with their experience of themselves within a community are also constructs of the wider cultural values (Vygotsky, 1986).

The Catechism teaches that in Adam and Eve's deliberate assertion of their free-will against God all humans thereafter are born of this original sin. That is, humans are autonomous, fallible, and tempted which inevitably creates a conflict between who one is, and who one was created to be. This schism may mean that self-forgiveness is inhibited when an individual is unable to find peace between these dissonant states. Indeed, in Catholicism there exists a stasis for believers of their own state of perpetual sin for which they must atone. Serious offences such as adultery and crime are considered to be mortal sins and require greater atonement, where venial sins are their lesser counterparts and may include immodesty, non-traditional sexual practices, and non-church attendance. Both require the sinner to reconcile with God through repentance and penance to receive divine forgiveness (Shafranske, 2000) despite the recognition within the 'Act of Contrition' prayer that sinners are likely to reoffend ("I will try not to sin again.") which negates the requirement of re-offence avoidance implied in self-forgiveness.

Protestants emphasise the Bible as '*Sola Scriptura'* translating to 'God's only book' and follow this as the only source of religious authority, whereas Catholics follow Canon law and Roman Catholic traditions in conjunction with the Bible providing them with moral and law-abiding rules of behaviour. Thus, if self-forgiveness is dependent upon messages gleaned from Biblical scripture, both Catholics and Protestants ought to respond in a similar way.

The Bible includes more than 80 passages that promote divine and interpersonal forgiveness yet none that promote self-forgiveness. There is a transactional idealisation of interpersonal forgiveness modelled by God: "If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15) whereby one's extension of forgiveness may

be obligatory rather than sincere. Indeed, the requirement to relinquish the right to judge one's transgressor is instead retroflexed as a judgement upon oneself, if one cannot forgive another, they are sinners themselves (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002).

Catholics believe that salvation is achieved through the Sacrament of baptism and then upheld by sacramental participation throughout several important life stages that serve as channels of grace. In contrast, Protestants assert that salvation has been promised through Jesus' sacrifice and no further action is required to fulfil this promise. Thus, for Catholics salvation is dependent upon faith, works and sacraments. Research shows that Pentecostal and Baptist Christians place energy on educational strategies to increase forgiveness whilst Catholics and Methodists demonstrated significantly less energy in this approach (Browning & Reed, 2004) suggesting a more passive approach to the process.

The seven sacraments within the Catholic Church are received during critical and developmental life moments comprising baptism, confirmation, communion, matrimony, reconciliation, holy orders, and extreme unction. These, in part, are received to absolve sinners of their sin and return them to God's grace. The Catholic Church teaches that confession and absolution are a necessary process for sinners to be reconciled both with God and the church itself (Code of Canon Law, 2014). Yet, the sacrament of reconciliation's practice of confessing one's sins aloud to the priest in persona-Christi, may exacerbate existing experiences of shame resulting in an increased negative self-evaluation (Murray, Ciarrocchi, Murray-Swank, 2007) and furthermore, may reduce one's capacity to perceive oneself as a good person (Dunning, 2008). Shafranske (2000) suggests that confessional acts are often experienced symbiotically with guilt, shame and anxiety which may be in contradiction with the message of the omnipotence of God who knows one's sins before they are uttered:

"Before a word is on my tongue Lord, you have known it." (Psalm 139:4).

Indeed, for Catholics to receive Holy Communion (the participation in the bread and wine transubstantiated into Jesus' body and blood) followers must first achieve absolution through contrition so as not to be in a state of sin upon receiving the Eucharist. Protestants in contrast assert that every baptised person can participate in the Lord's Supper. Therefore, again Catholics are required to earn their participation whereas Protestants are assured it. Although this presents Catholic practices as negative, it could be argued that the act of seeking reconciliation aloud promotes one's capacity for responsibility leading to greater acceptance and reconciliation (Mu & Bobocel, 2019).

Indeed, the weekly reciting of the Penitential Act in Catholic Masses may be seen to reinforce the assumption of guilt, whereby the congregational declaration of sin accompanied by the three times striking of the breast whilst saying the words "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault," follows a plea for divine and peer forgiveness. The mutuality of the group task may bring comfort, and the implied exoneration, a sense of relief for believers. Thus, the state of forgiveness is likely to be achieved not from the act of reciting the prayer, but the sincerity with which one approaches it. Nonetheless, this tendency for Catholics to follow ritualistic practice and behaviour may be evidence of orthopraxy whereby the emphasis is placed upon behavioural primacy as opposed to belief.

It makes sense that the committing of a transgression which contravenes the doctrines of one's faith is likely to result in guilt associated with the offence and the shame associated with the failure to live up to the moral code in which one ascribes (Lund, 2017). The propensity for individuals to respond to negative behaviour with additional negative behaviour is not limited to religious individuals alone (Witvliet & McCullough, 2007). Indeed, the ancient Buddhist philosophy refers to dukkha as the self-administered second arrow which wounds the afflicted individual following the initial pain or misdemeanour of the first arrow (Jordan, 2016). Thus, there appears to be a tendency for fallible individuals to

respond to wrongdoings in punitive and self-degrading ways which prolong one's suffering. This tendency is not unique to Catholics, however. Research has shown that religiosity correlates strongly with self-deprecation and condemnation in the wake of a transgression and Catholics have been found to have powerful super-ego guilt, associated with morality and conscience (Hailparn & Hailparn, 1994) with their religious practice argued to be utilised as a defence against the internalised conflict between sin and piety (Maddi & Rulla, 1972). In fact, Catholic frustration tolerance for internal conflict has been demonstrated to be lower than that of other Christian populations (Celmer & Winer, 1990) which may negatively influence their capacity for self-forgiveness.

The extent to which a Christian perceives and introspects on their transgression may influence their predisposition towards shame or guilt and subsequently their propensity for self-forgiveness. Research shows that sin-severity is associated with stronger experiences of shame and guilt (Exline, Kaplan, & Grubbs, 2012), moreover, the greater the perceived offence, the less worthy one feels of forgiveness (Wohl & McGrath, 2007). Although research observes that penitents consider the extent of objective harm that one's egregious offence may have inflicted on their victim, there is likely to be a greater degree of dissonance when one contravenes their own moral or doctrinal ideals (Hall & Fincham, 2005). When individuals consider their transgressions to be particularly erroneous, they may demonstrate conciliatory behaviours in their quest for redemption and rumination of guilt. Hall and Fincham (2008) assert that this exaggerated response is resultant of the transgressors belief that they are unlikely to be forgiven and consequentially are unable to self-forgive.

Yet, a disproportionate acceptance of responsibility for a transgression such as that observed in Catholic guilt, may also be antecedent of low self-esteem (Yao, Chen, Yu, & Sang, 2017), conformity for social belonging (Effron & Knowles, 2015), and obligation (Rowland, 2005). This might suggest therefore that self-forgiveness is influenced by not only

one's faith but also the social and societal rewards from which followers derive belonging and self-value. Thus, the implications of contravening the doctrines of one's faith may not be limited to the inhibition of self-forgiveness alone but may also threaten the extrinsic religious values pertaining to the practice of faith (Arli, Septianto, & Chowdhury, 2020).

Catholic guilt

The concept of Catholic guilt is a widely accepted phenomenon which implies a generalized proclivity for Catholic individuals to experience angst for an eclectic array of sins, including those imagined or inconsequential (Sheldon, 2006). Indeed, research shows that Catholic individuals experience higher introjected beliefs comprising excessive social and negative ego representation leaving them susceptible to feelings of inadequacy and demotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To date there is a scarcity of psychological research that explores the phenomenon and what there is appears to conflict others. The research of Vaisy and Smith (2008) found that Catholic American teenagers were no more likely to experience guilt than their non-Catholic counterparts. Indeed, other research has found evidence of Jewish guilt (Dein, 2013), Protestant guilt (Walinga, Corveleyn, & van Saane, 2005) and Muslim guilt (Syahrivar, Hermawan, Gyulavari, & Chairy, 2021). Yet, Catholics may be different in their communication of this guilt. Lindsay-Hartz (1984) described how Catholics within his qualitative interview study presented themselves as keen to communicate their experiences of guilt, suggesting that Catholic guilt may have a special function for Catholics.

Catholic guilt has often been considered synonymous with scrupulosity which pertains to the pathological and maladaptive guiltiness and anxiety experienced as a result of a transgression (Miller & Hedges, 2008) and is strongly connected to the experience and expression of one's conscience (Ciarrocchi, 1995). However, where Catholic guilt has been thought of as constructive in its tendency to motivate sufferers towards reparation (Walinga,

Corveleyn & van Saane, 2005). Scrupulosity may be maladaptive. Nonetheless, the portrayal of Catholic guilt may be more popularly defined and understood by the characteristics of scrupulosity rather than Catholic guilt itself.

Indeed, the self-condemnation implied in Catholic guilt may be consequential of the negative self-evaluation of one's behaviour which is experienced in conflict with one's moral self-representation (McKay, Herold, & Whitehouse, 2012). These evaluations may become pathological when they perpetuate self-critical schemas and punitive behaviour (Davis, Worthington, Hook & Hill, 2013) and thus impede the benevolence necessary for authentic self-forgiveness.

Research shows that formative experiences directly impact one's attitudinal predisposition towards guilt (Malti, 2016) which may have important ramifications for cradle-Catholics (those born and raised Catholic) who are raised in the belief of their own imperfection. Yet, shame and guilt are also strongly correlated with reduced self-esteem (Wolf, Cohen, Panter, & Insko, 2010). Where guilt relates to the transgressional act, shame can be understood as pertaining to one's belief about oneself intrinsically (Tangney, Stuewig, & Hafez, 2011) and thus, self-forgiveness will be threatened if one perceives themselves as implicitly 'good' or 'bad' (Vitz & Meade, 2011), worthy or unworthy (Hourigan, 2019). Furthermore, those who internalise their religion indiscriminately without challenge have been observed to possess a lower self-concept (Blazek & Besta, 2012).

Tangney et al (2007) argue that shame and guilt are not equally moral emotions. Guilt is moral whereas shame is not. That is, guilty individuals perceive themselves as evil and reproach themselves, whereas ashamed individuals perceive themselves as ugly and dislike themselves. Thus, in experiences of Catholic guilt, it is likely that one's reproachful introspective response is likely to result in self-condemnation and a motivation for reparation (Walinga, Corveleyn, & van Saane, 2005).

Conversely, shame is more likely to be experienced when an individuals' transgression is exposed to a judging audience (Smith, Webster, Parrot, & Eyre, 2002). Thus, Catholic ritualistic practices that require that transgressors seeking absolution through sacramental reconciliation and in group practices of congregational contrition ought to elicit shame and not guilt. Indeed, Tangney, Stuewig and Hafaz (2011) suggest that although guilt motivates the intention for confession, apology, and reparation it is possible that the ritual itself may induce shame.

Miceli and Castelfranchi (2018) argue that feeling guilty involves viewing oneself as a transgressor which entails a negative behavioural evaluation of responsibility and perceived harm. However, when this negative self-evaluation concerns a lack of personal power to resist sin one cannot experience guilt. Yet, the concept of Catholic guilt denotes followers experiencing guilt in response to their own fallibility, a condition determined and inherited by the sins of Adam and Eve and guilt therefore is a part of the human condition for which one must continually atone. The doctrinal standards of behaviour incited by the Ten Commandments may also be argued to be beyond most human capacity. Thus, the argument of human control as a predictor of guilt appears to contradict the experience of Catholic guilt (Kouchaki, Oveis, & Gino, 2014).

It may be more appropriate therefore, to consider shame as an accompaniment to Catholic guilt since this would acknowledge self-evaluative inadequacy in response to impossible doctrinal standards of behaviour, as opposed to guilt experienced as a result of perceived harmfulness (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2018).

To conclude, Catholic guilt has been evidenced to be characterised by self-condemnation and rumination (Dulles, 2003), and thus, it may be a reasonable assumption that Catholic practices that reinforce the belief in one's proclivity for sin may inhibit the proclivity for self-forgiveness. Moreover, some individuals may struggle to experience divine

forgiveness in the wake of a transgression when their experienced shame is so deeply internalised that they feel undeserving of it (Vitz & Meade, 2011). Yet, research shows that when followers feel able to confess their sins to God via priest in persona-Christi, they find the unconditional acceptance required to find comfort (Szablowinski, 2011). Nonetheless, many Catholics find the Sacrament of reconciliation challenging particularly in the act of confession (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003) and thus, it will be valuable to understand the contributors of this discomfort and the purpose the sacrament serves for its penitents.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientation

A key factor in the understanding of how the practice of religion contributes to the disinclination towards self-forgiveness might be one's religious motivation orientation. This concept pertains to the source from which one derives religious support. Where extrinsic religious orientation refers to the external gains associated with religiosity including the social benefits of belonging to the faith community, intrinsic orientation involves the personal sense of spirituality and one's own internalised beliefs (King & Crowther, 2004). Weaver and Angle (2002) assert that extrinsically motivated individuals use their faith, where intrinsically motivated individuals live it. Moreover, intrinsically motivated individuals who report a higher state of self-agency have been found to have better coping behaviours (Dezutter, Soenens, & Hutsebaut, 2006) perhaps because their faith is internalised and thus not under threat by expulsion from the group.

Research shows that individuals who practice intrinsic religiosity experience less guilt than those with an extrinsic motivation (Maltby, 2005). Under the general phenomenon of Catholic guilt in which followers experience increased guilt and remorse as a consequence of their sensitivity to transgression, extrinsically religious individuals may be unable to cope

effectively with guilt, and thus retention of guilt may be unhealthy for these individuals (Maltby, 2001).

An older study by Greely and Durkin (1984) found that Catholic individuals exhibited strong religious identification whilst also remaining actively involved in parish and community works, however, they were devoted to the didactic doctrines of the faith instead selecting for themselves which aspects to assimilate or deny suggesting an extrinsic religious orientation. They assert:

> "With the decline in importance of institutional structures, Catholics increasingly look to their faith for comfort and challenge, for inspiration in life and consolation in death. Few take seriously anymore the Church as teacher on either moral or social action matters. The Church is not for ethics, it is for religion." (Greely & Durkin, 1982, p.28)

In the research of Meek, Albright and McMinn (1995) the relationship between religious orientation, individual guilt experiences and forgiveness were explored. Participants imagined themselves as transgressors in three different scenarios and their levels of guilt were recorded. Their findings concluded that not only did extrinsically religious participants experience higher guilt than their intrinsic counterparts, but they also had a lower likelihood of transgression re-offence and a higher likelihood of confession. Additionally, all participants within this study experienced higher levels of guilt following disclosure and a significant reduction in this guilt when anticipating confession, which provides a valuable rationale for the Catholic rituals of reconciliation.

Yet, individuals who internalise intrinsic religiosity may be better placed to understand their shame, guilt, and remorse and thus, their experiences of these negative emotions are less likely to be damaging (Tangney, Boone, & Deering, 2005). Furthermore,

extrinsically oriented individuals are less able to report self-forgiveness and the experience of God's forgiveness than intrinsically oriented followers (Lawler-Row, 2010).

In sum, despite orthogonal divergence, the repercussions of non-adherent behaviour and transgression might be experienced by penitents in both intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientations to differing degrees (Smither & Walker, 2015). Yet, those who experience greater intrinsic orientation experience less guilt that those who experience extrinsic orientation. An important topic that could bear upon both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity is locus of evaluation since it places similar emphasis on internal and external motivation for self-value as opposed to religiosity.

Locus of evaluation orientation and self-forgiveness

"The individual increasingly comes to feel that this locus of evaluation lies within himself. Less and less does he look to others for approval or disapproval; for standards to live by; for decisions and choices. He recognizes that it rests within himself to choose; that the only question which matters is, 'Am I living in a way which is deeply satisfying to me, and which truly expresses me? This I think is perhaps the most important question." (Rogers, 1961, p. 112).

Rogers' (1964) Locus of Evaluation theory describes the extent to which one's self-concept and sense of value are dependent upon judgements and expectations of others rather than the trust in one's own moral compass. Indeed, Burcur (2007) asserts that four individual factors dictate Locus of Evaluation orientation. The first, low self-regard, pertains to negative self-appraisal and willingness to accept and internalise feedback gleaned from others which is the closest to Rogers' (1964) original theory. The second, concern for others' opinions, refers to the individual's implicit need to gauge self-reflected appraisals of others. The third, dependence, considers the dependency of self-evaluation of behaviours upon external

sources, and the last, public self-consciousness pertains to one's concern for how one is presented in society.

The concept of locus of evaluation has similar epistemological characteristics to some aspects of self-esteem research (Raskin & Rogers, 2000). Self-esteem has been defined as an individual's subjective self-evaluation of self-worth (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, & Robins, 2011). It may be further distinguished from global and domain-specific positions (Donnellan, et al., 2011), where the former refers to an individual's' total evaluation of worth, the latter acknowledges the requirement for individuals to assess their self-worth in concert with the domain in which self-esteem is experienced including: social relationships, schools, and church. As such, self-esteem has been found to positively impact the proclivity for self-forgiveness (Strelan, 2007).

In a similar dichotomised position to locus of evaluation, self-esteem can be either positive or negative. Low self-esteem describes a significant self-criticism and a dependency on the approval or validation of others (Orth & Robins, 2013) which may pertain to an external locus of evaluation in which individuals introject the opinions of others as value statements. In contrast, a high self-esteem in which one feels confident to act upon their own judgement without the fear of disapproval (Orth & Robins, 2013) has similar traits to an external locus of evaluation whereby individuals can utilise internal organismic valuing.

Wedding and Corsini (2013) assert that as an individual achieves self-esteem, they become more capable of shifting the foundations of their standards and values from others to themselves. Furthermore, that when negative self-attitudes are replaced in favour of positive, individuals are less dependent upon others for these values and standards and thus their locus of evaluation is more likely to be external (Rogers & Raskin, 2000). Yet, research shows that it is the combination of hedonic and eudaimonic processes that facilitate genuine self-forgiveness (Woodyatt and Wenzel, 2017) which require transgressors to first confront the

reality of their offence and recommit to their social values before they can employ the self-compassion associated with self-forgiveness. Therefore, in shifting the foundations of one's standards and evaluation from an external to an internal position, it may negate the pro-social action required for authentic self-forgiveness.

Applying this understanding to the experience of transgression, the person-centred psychotherapeutic origins of the locus of evaluation concept argue that 'experience of the subjective context that is governed by logic, causation, success, or failure, gives access to the inner locus of evaluation and the freedom from moralistic or pathologizing judgements' (Wedding & Corsini, 2013, p. 125). Zimring (1995, p. 41) describes two opposing internal contexts: the objective context (founded within one's culture) and the subjective context (founded within oneself). In this way, a transgressor may only experience therapeutic change through confrontation and acknowledgment of one's own subjective experience rather than through the judgement of others. Yet, self-forgiveness research implies that following a transgression there may be a place for both an objective and subjective exploration of one's offence involving; responsibility, remorse, restoration, and renewal (Cornish & Wade, 2015).

Where an internal locus of evaluation may be considered optimal, this does not infer total independence from others in self-evaluations (Burcur, 2007) rather, it is a field in which both internal and external factors are integrated. Conversely, when individuals are motivated to consider and internalise the feedback from others in favour of their own judgement when establishing self-attitudes, an external locus of evaluation results. This may be evident in psychotherapeutic research where individuals assimilate clinical diagnoses into their self-concept and thus become indistinguishable from them as though their diagnosis is equivalent to any other self-descriptor (Wedding & Corsini, 2013, p. 115). This may parallel research on Catholic guilt in which Catholic individuals were keen to identify as guilty (Lindsay-Hartz,

1984) and as such, in the same way may integrate their Catholic guilt within their self-concept.

The two loci of evaluation may be valuable in understanding religious self-forgiveness practices since they involve an upholding of one's social and moral obligation to retain implicit conditions of worth (Exline, Lisan, & Lisan, 2011) suggesting an externalised response. Indeed, when individuals attempt to withdraw from a transgression without working through the negative emotions associated with their offence it is likely to result in pseudo self-forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013) whereby the desire to reintegrate into the social group to which one ascribes and achieve group belonging takes primacy over authentic reparation. Moreover, when individuals take a disproportionate amount of responsibility following an offence (Yao, Chen, Yu, & Sang, 2017) or because of religious obligation derived from a desire to belong (Long, Chen, Potts, Hanson, & VanderWeele, 2020) it is likely to inhibit authentic self-forgiveness rather than enhance it.

The research of McConnel and Dixon (2012) found in Catholic populations that the subjective feeling of divine and interpersonal forgiveness correlated significantly with self-forgiveness. Despite this, Strabbing (2017) argues that, from a Catholic theological stance, forgiveness may only be achieved externally to oneself since it requires the judgement and acceptance that can only occur in relationships. This externalised requirement may support the presentation of an external locus of evaluation in Catholics, however, it may be argued that faith is an internalised process with one's relationship with God private and intimate and would instead support an internal locus of evaluation.

Where one's locus of evaluation may determine the internal and external motivation within the practice of one's faith, 'the self' may also be understood from dichotomised spiritual and social constructs (James, 1890) or from private and public standpoints (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) in which the private self is characterised by cognitive,

emotive, and id-like drives (Freud, 1961) and the public counterpart, similar to an external locus of evaluation, referring to self as a social object dependent upon approval and belonging.

Research shows that individuals who exhibit elevated levels of public self-consciousness also report increased social anxiety and low self-esteem (Hope & Heimberg, 1988) with unforgiving and critical perceptions of their own behaviour. This appears consistent with research on morality and religiosity as predictors of prosocial behaviour (Antonaccio, & Tittle, 2008) yet they might also present as a false consciousness in which beliefs are indoctrinated as opposed to autonomously chosen, and conversely become oppressive instead of supportive (DiPaolo & Simpson, 2016). Yet, these negative effects have been found to be diminished when individuals are in the presence of close friends and family (Froming, Corely, & Rinker, 2006), suggesting that the internalisation of one's faith and acceptance within its congregation may be a crucial factor in predicting outcomes.

In contrast, Sociometer Theory asserts that the individual's motivation towards self-esteem is an externalised process which is driven by the explicit need for social value and acceptance (Fenigstein, et al., 1975). As such it is a relational process in which individuals gauge their self-value against social determinants as implied by the name 'socio-meter,' including participation in religious practices and rituals which serve to reinforce collective behaviours and beliefs that underpin the state of belonging to one's faith (Reitz, Motti-Stefanidi, Asendorpf, 2016).

Therefore, the affective process of self-conscious evaluation requires that individuals respond to acceptance and rejection by focusing on both transitory emotive responses and the consequential affective judgements that derive from them. This might imply self-value judgements, such as those required to actualise self-forgiving behaviours, are derived

externally in the presence of religiosity since they are intrinsically connected to implicit needs for acceptance and belonging.

Conversely, in the assumption that shame is evoked by external feedback or affect, one might infer that it might also correlate with the fear of disapproval to, and thus, it may be felt without the need for negative self-evaluation (Rothmund & Baumert, 2014). Higuchi (2000) suggests that the primary distinction between guilt and shame is the private or public evaluation of one's transgression (Higuchi, 2000) suggesting that people tend to feel guilty when their transgressions are private whereas shame usually is experienced when transgressions are publicly confronted.

In sum, locus of evaluation may pertain to the place in which we derive our sense of self-value (internally or externally), yet this is likely to be influenced by many other factors including, self-esteem (Raskin & Rogers, 2000), social-group values and belonging (Wedding & Corsini, 2013) and self-identity (Wedding & Corsini, 2013). Although positive self-esteem has been found to increase the propensity for self-forgiveness (Strelan, 2007) this may require for individuals to experience negative affect following a transgression to achieve self-forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2017). Furthermore, despite the preference for individuals to lean towards an internal locus of evaluation in which they favour their own judgements over those of others, to deny external feedback may inhibit the potential for authentic self-forgiveness. Yet, when individuals become confluent with externalised feedback, or assimilate external feedback into their self-concept (Wedding & Corsini, 2013) an external locus of evaluation is likely to result. Thus, locus of evaluation may provide an opportunity to understand the way in which Catholic followers internalise their self-value following a transgression. A healthy locus of evaluation does not infer total independence from the evaluation of others (Burcur, 2007) rather, the potential for individuals to move

along an intersubjective continuum of the two poles of internal and external evaluation which incorporate both one's social values in conjunction with one's internal affective experience.

The Rationale and Research Gap

In 1996, Enright and the Human Study Group defined self-forgiveness as "the willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's objective wrong whilst fostering compassion, generosity and love towards oneself" (p. 116). Hall and Fincham's (2005) seminal paper on self-forgiveness served as a catalyst for the subsequent increase in empirical research, identifying many characteristics that might contribute to the phenomenon, including: shame, guilt, empathy, conciliatory behaviour, attributions, and transgression-specific characteristics. However, Griffin, Worthington, Davis, Hook and Maguen (2018) argue that as research continues to grow in this area so do the challenges for researchers in how they may integrate their understanding of self-forgiveness within general psychological theory and develop psychometric measures that reflect the complexity of the phenomenon. Indeed, even now self-forgiveness research is in its infancy with significant challenges resulting from a lack of universal definition of the phenomenon (Wohl, et al., 2008) moreover, the processes by which self-forgiveness is achieved are unclear (Hsu, 2021).

The lack of universal definition and resultant difficulty in capturing the characteristics of self-forgiveness phenomenon provides a first rationale for the qualitative design of the first study. Where few studies have taken an open-ended approach to the study of self-forgiveness, Study 1, using a semi-structured questionnaire, will aim to capture the epistemological, subjective, and evolving didactic experiences of self-forgiveness in Catholic followers without the prescriptive definitions of psychometric apparatus that have dominated the field of self-forgiveness research to date (Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008).

Another gap in research is demonstrated in the lack of studies that explore the religious background of the self-forgiveness phenomenon. Fincham, May, and Chavez (2020) note that despite over three decades of research which postulates that religious practice is related to the proclivity for interpersonal forgiveness (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007), there is significantly less literature that investigates the relationship between religion and self-forgiveness. Yet, Fincham et al. (2020) recent research found a causal relationship between religion (measured by religious activity and forgiveness by God) and self-forgiveness. Furthermore, in their study where participants were shown images of either an angry God, a benevolent God, or a non-religious image, before completing a psychometric self-forgiveness questionnaire, participants who were shown an angry God were found to be less self-forgiving than other participants, and participants who were shown a non-religious image were found to be most self-forgiving. Fincham et al. (2020) assert as a result that "there is a need for investigation of mechanisms that might account for a potential causal relation between religion and self-forgiveness" (p. 400). This provides a second rationale for this study.

Finally, a thorough literature review did not yield any research directly connecting the theory of locus of evaluation to the practice or internalisation of religion. Instead, there are suggestive existing studies exploring how religion interacts with other concepts such as self-esteem, identity, and sociometer theory, along with the similar epistemological role of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity in understanding group belonging and behaviour in religious individuals. These concepts, although distinct, have similarities to the characteristics associated with locus of evaluation. Without prior literature connecting self-forgiveness and locus of evaluation it is difficult to assume the direction of influence (whether an internal locus of evaluation increases the propensity for self-forgiveness) however, Catholic emphasis on ritualization and orthopraxy in conjunction with the use of the clergy as intermediaries

between God and man may predispose Catholics to be dependent upon externalised feedback to garner self-value and forgiveness. This would be indicative of an external locus of evaluation. Therefore, this research gap linking self-forgiveness to locus of evaluation provides a third rationale for this study in questioning: do Catholics have an external locus of evaluation? How do Catholics experience self-forgiveness without the doctrines to support the phenomenon?

In sum, to understand how Catholicism might influence one's proclivity for self-forgiveness we must first understand how Catholic individuals both practice their faith and respond to transgression. This understanding can then bear on the main research question, which is to understand the presence or absence of self-forgiveness and other relevant emotions felt by Catholics following a transgression and how religious practices may contribute to this.

Study 1

Few qualitative studies offer insight into the essence of self-forgiveness and the lived experiences of those who seek it (Young, Wiggins-Frame, & Cashwell, 2007). Forgiveness research has previously been characterized by self-report questionnaires (Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008) which seek to align prescriptive definitions of forgiveness rather than the lived experiences that contribute to the phenomenon (Strelan & Covic, 2006).

Adopting an epistemological view that knowledge can be obtained through experience (Magaldi-Dopman, Park-Taylor, Ponterotto, 2011), this qualitative semi structured interview study will explore the emotive, behavioural, and attitudinal effects of Catholicism upon individual experiences of self-forgiveness from a constructivist stance in which meaning is constructed by the participants themselves.

Since qualitative data can be argued to be post-dictive rather than predictive (Fetzer & Hempel, 2017), this study will have a central research question rather than a hypothesis: "What are the emotive experiences of Catholic individuals following a transgression?" Additionally:

1. What does self-forgiveness feel like for Catholic individuals?

2. At what point do individuals perceive that they have self-forgiven?

3. Which actions, attitudes and feelings are experienced following a transgression?

4. What do religious practices contribute to forgiving behaviours?

5. Which actions attitudes and feelings are experienced following self-forgiveness?

Method

Participants and Sample Size

The sample size was set at 20 participants. This was based on previous research which argues that qualitative data should be extensive enough to enable the generation of thematic understanding of the studied phenomenon, yet small enough to enable deeper, introspective understanding (Turner-Bowker, Lamoureaux, Stokes, Litcher-Kelly, & Shields, 2018). Moreover, when using research specific directive questions research show that little unique information is produced with more than twenty participants (Lincoln & Guber, 1985).
To participate, participants were required to be practicing Catholic. This was ascertained utilizing a data collection inventory prior to selection. Participants were recruited by poster campaign advertisements in Catholic Churches across Southeast Kent, UK.

Twenty participants were recruited comprising 9 male and 11 female individuals (see Table 1 for a demographic composition of participants). The mean age of participants was 53.8 for men and 50.8 for women. Although every effort was made to recruit a younger sample the youngest participant was 28 years old. However, this appears to be consistent with previous research findings that suggest that young adults have a period of abstinence from church attendance during early adulthood (Smith, 2005).

Table 1.

Demographic Composition of Sample.

Participant (*pseudonym)	Gender	Age
Andrew	M	69
Claire	F	68
Carla	F	44
Paul	M	43
Nigel	M	68
Richard	M	43

Barbara	F	65
Deborah	F	41
Carol	F	28
Mark	M	31
Louise	F	38
David	M	42
Alex	M	40
Naomi	F	54
Heather	F	57
Victoria	F	38
Rosemary	F	63
Jeffrey	M	77
Clive	M	71
Valerie	F	63

Note. Table demonstrates demographic information for Study 1 sample. M represents Male, F represents Female. N=20. Male n = 9 (mean age 53.8); Female n = 11 (mean age 50.8).

Materials

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews were required to be conducted online via the Zoom platform (as opposed to the preferred in-person method). However, this platform enabled password protected meetings which allowed for confidentiality and recording to facilitate transcribing. Participants were required to have access to computer and internet technology.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted face to face online using the Zoom platform (see Table 2 for an outline of the study characteristics). There were six semi-structured research questions with additional question prompts to ensure participant adherence to the research subject intention. These prompts were used only when participants strayed too far from the question or failed to understand its intention. These questions were as follows:

1. Tell me about your relationship with faith….

PROMPTS: How does being Catholic feel? What does it entail?

2. As you understand and practice Catholicism, what part does responding to sin play for you emotionally?

PROMPTS: How do you reconcile with your faith following a transgression? What does it entail? How does that feel? What emotions characterize sin for you?

3. Think about a time in which you committed a transgression against another person. You don't need to share the details. How do you feel in this moment now, as you remember it?

PROMPTS: How did you feel about it at the time? How did you resolve the matter?

Do you feel that you have you been forgiven? (By the victim / God) How do you know? How does that feel? Have you forgiven yourself? How do you know? What did it entail? How did it feel?

4. When you think about forgiveness, who do you believe can forgive you? What about forgiveness of the self?

PROMPTS: How does it feel when you have forgiven yourself? (What emotions do you experience?) How does it feel when others have forgiven you? How does it feel when God has forgiven you?

5. What is your understanding of Catholic doctrines of self-forgiveness?

PROMPTS: How does this impact how you feel about and experience self-forgiveness personally? Does it make it easier or more difficult?

6. Tell me about your experiences of receiving the sacrament of reconciliation

PROMPTS: How do you feel whilst you wait to see the priest? How do you feel when you relay your sins to the priest? How do you feel afterwards? Are there any residual feelings of guilt or shame? What does forgiveness entail following this sacrament?

Upon cessation of the interview, participants were then debriefed as to the intentions of the research (Appendix C) and were offered signposting information as a contingency for evocation of emotional distress.

Table 2

Dissection of methods for Study 1

Section	Contents
Design	Qualitative (Semi-structured interviews)
Sample	• *N*=20; Male *N* = 9 (mean age 53.8); Female *N* = 11 (mean age 50.8). • Inclusion criteria = Over age of 18; practicing Catholic
Data collection	• Ethical approval obtained from University of Kent • Informed consent sought prior to interview both in writing and verbally communicated. • Interviews were conducted by the researcher online via Zoom and recorded on this platform. Interviews were semi-structured with six core open questions. • Participants debriefed as to the purpose of the study afterwards and reminded of their right to withdraw.
Data Analysis	• Data preparation: Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews. • Pseudonyms allocated to data to allow for anonymity • Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis of the corpus following Braun and Clark (2008) framework.

Note. This table demonstrates the chronological methodology for Study 1.
N=20

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using Thematic Analysis since it does not ascribe to a particular theoretical presupposition or value, therefore, it provides potential for an expansive field of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008). This bottom-up approach enabled interpretation and understanding to explore the phenomenology of religious emotive practice. Utilising the research questions posed in this study, a thematic framework was created whereby the transcribed participant data were coded and grouped with others of similar content (see Table 3 for a dissection of methods for Study 1). Distinctions between themes of similarity and

disparity were identified and a thematic table was created. These initial meta-themes were then amalgamated and condensed to absolute groups of organized themes which were then reclassified under phenomenon-related macro-themes (Lawless & Chen, 2018) and examined against the research questions to ensure complementarity of research focus (see Table 4 for a comparison of thematic themes and research focus).

Analytic Strategy

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process for thematic analysis was used to provide direction in analysing the data corpus. Stage one involved familiarisation of the data whereby audio transcripts of participant interviews were transcribed and read and reread to ensure that I had immersed myself within the subject theme and had a good understanding of the message each participant was conveying. I made notes about significant language and phrases as part of this process, and these provided rudimentary patterns and themes as a focal point for subsequent stages of analysis.

Stage two involved the initial coding of the data and the allocation of relevant data to each generated code. The aim of this stage was to reduce the data to meaningful yet manageable portions of passages and words, to facilitate the emergence of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I initially highlighted in different colours sections of text comprising important sentences or phrases pertaining to an idea or feeling expressed, and then ascribed shorthand labels to convey their content. The initial codes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Initial codes generated at stage of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Initial code names
Dishonesty and withholding
Guilt
Inevitable sin
Omnipotent God
Fallibility
Judgement day
Penance
Deservingness
Earning divine forgiveness
Perfectionism
Rumination
Community judgement
Consequences of non-adherence
Prayer disconnection
Belonging
Shame
Sin severity
Self-forgiveness not possible
Self-punishment
Selective confession
Intermediary between self and God
Sorry enough
Necessary practice
Extrinsic/intrinsic motivation
Lack of self-forgiveness doctrines
Lack of self-forgiveness experience
Internal relationship with God

Note. Table shows the initial codes generated during the second stage thematic analysis
N=20

Phase three involved the generation of themes (see Table 4) which required me to analyse and organise codes and recognise patterns within them to enable the development of rudimentary themes. During this process I reanalysed the corpus as some codes did not completely describe the concept or phenomenon the initial code implied. Thus, I repeated stage two which created additional codes that were more specific in their description. During phase three of analysis several codes were amalgamated within these themes since they conveyed much broader meanings than the codes themselves. Some codes here were discarded due to either a lack of frequency within the overall data corpus, or a lack of relevance to the research question.

Table 4

Generation of thematic themes during stage three of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Theme	Supporting code	Research question
Inauthenticity	• Selective confession	3, 4
	• Necessary practice	3, 4
	• Intermediary between self and God	3, 4
	• Prayer disconnection	3, 4, 5
	• Dishonesty and withholding	3, 4
Catholic Guilt	• Guilt	2, 3, 4
	• Shame	2, 3, 4
	• Sin severity	2, 3, 4
	• Perfectionism	2, 3, 4
	• Fallibility	2, 3
	• Sorry enough	2, 3,
	• Self-punishment	3, 4, 5
Atonement	• Penance	2, 3, 5
	• Omnipotence of God	2, 3, 5
	• Earning divine forgiveness	2, 3, 5
	• Judgement day	3, 5
Motivation	• Extrinsic & Intrinsic	3, 4
	• Belonging	3, 4
	• Consequences of non-adherence	3, 4
	• Internal relationship with God	2, 3, 5,
Self-Unforgiveness	• Judgement	2, 3, 4
	• Rumination	1, 2, 3, 4
	• Self-punishment	2, 3
	• Lack of self-forgiveness doctrines	4
	• Self-forgiveness not possible	4
	• Absence of self-forgiveness experiences	1, 2, 3
	• Deservingness	1, 2, 5

Note. Themes with supporting codes and their relationship to the research question for this study. Research questions perceive that they have self-forgiven? 3. Which actions, attitudes and feelings are experienced following a transgression? 4. What do religious practices contribute to forgiving behaviours? 5. Which actions attitudes and feelings are experienced following self-forgiveness?
N=20

Stage four involved reviewing the themes to ensure that they were a good representation of both the individual codes and the overall corpus. This stage was initially difficult because I was uncertain as to whether I was finding evidence that fulfilled the overall research questions - "What does self-forgiveness feel like for Catholics?" and "What religious practices contribute to forgiving behaviours?" Neither of these questions appeared to be addressed fully by the data because of the tendency for participants to report

inexperience within the phenomenon of self-forgiveness. Yet, the emergent themes appeared to be important in exploring another observed phenomenon. In taking a reflexive approach I decided to develop and incorporate an additional theme that acknowledged this unexpected result. I then returned to the initial data repeated stages one, two, and three to ensure that I had retrieved any additional data that might support or refute this new theme. As a final part of this stage, I reread the entire corpus to ensure that the themes that I had generated were a good fit for the data and to confirm that I had not omitted anything of importance.

Stage five involved defining and naming these themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure that I had met the goals of this stage I concentrated on the definition of each theme and what message the data conveyed concerning my research questions, specifically where it related to experiences of self-forgiveness, transgression, and Catholicism.

Stage six involved the production of results. In this stage, I selected the most salient extract examples from the corpus to demonstrate each theme. These were used to make an argument that addressed the research questions founded upon prior literature review and empirical research.

Results

The analysis was inductive as opposed to reliant upon prior findings, examining discourse to identify pertinent themes throughout the verbal dialogue. Analysis of five semi-structured interview questions in conjunction with subject-relevant prompts, revealed five emergent themes: a) Catholic guilt, b) Atonement and reckoning, c) Inauethentic practice, d) Religious motivation orientation, and e) Self-unforgiveness (see Table 4 for themes generated using thematic analysis).

Catholic Guilt

Participants in this study reported self-punitive responses to their transgressions accompanied by feelings of guilt or shame both in the wake of a transgression and for a protracted time after. This was consistent with McKay, Herold, and Whitehouse's (2013) definition of Catholic guilt as the disproportionate internalisation of guilt along with punitive and self-deprecating behaviour following a moral transgression. Furthermore, many participants disclosed that they tended to hold on to their misdeeds long after the perceived offense resulting in rumination and over-thinking. However, in a comparable way to the research of Lindsay-Hartz (1984) participants disclosed their guilt willingly and felt a strong sense of identity with it. Indeed, guilt along with shame was spoken about by every participant in this study.

The Sacrament of reconciliation was spoken about by participants as a punitive process of culpability in which they were obligated to participate. Where Sacramental reconciliation is intended to restore sinners to God's grace and in doing so assure them of forgiveness, participants rarely reported feeling any sense of relief from participation and perceived it as a punishment rather than a gift. Naomi felt a sense of resignation to her fate of enduring this form of penance:

> I suppose it is part of my punishment for doing wrong in the first place. That I have to relay my failings to the priest and do penance (Naomi)

This fits with prior research that suggests that when individuals behave immorally or in discord with the doctrines of their faith, they are willing to undertake aversive experiences to relieve their experience of guilt (Bastian, Jetten, & Fasoli, 2011).

Participants explored a tendency to ruminate following a transgression in conjunction with a feeling of perpetual angst. Although some reported an eventual possibility of moving

on from a misdemeanour this did not appear to be consequential of self-forgiveness or acceptance. Claire explicitly stated that even following a lesser venial sin she still felt unworthy of forgiveness:

> I over think about it. I go over it again and again in my head and then eventually I'll move on from it. I don't feel that I deserve forgiveness (Claire).

Indeed, participants spoke about a tendency to dwell upon transgressions long after the event had happened. Carla recalled an occasion where she had felt that she had failed to treat another person in a "Christian way," despite recognising that the other person had not recognised her misdemeanour nor felt the impact of her behaviour. Nonetheless, she had experienced shame and rumination for a protracted time afterward which only dissipated in the completion of works within the parish community.

> I think the other person probably never thought any more about it, but it's just something that stuck with me for ages because I felt ashamed that I'd behaved in that way, so I did some jobs for an old lady at church to try and sort of make up for it. (Carla)

The completion of works as a form of retribution and reparation is a well-established characteristic of the pro-social function of guilt (Kouchaki, Oveis, & Gino, 2014). Yet, if guilt is maladaptive then these behaviours may fail to have the relieving effect that works may provide. It appears that Catholic guilt may relate to the experience and expression of one's conscience which is prone to self-conscious emotions such as guilt, shame, and embarrassment. When asked to think about the feelings that she experienced following a transgression, Louise spoke about an internal conflict of trying to be good versus doing bad and she related this to her identity as a Catholic referring to herself as a 'bad Catholic.' This dissonance between good and bad behaviour was expressed as a function of her conscience:

> Loads of emotions. Just the real sense of being a bad person and a bad Catholic and being judged for not sticking to the rule book. And it just stays with me, like having a bad conscience. (Louise)

The implication of her 'bad conscience' was rumination and a feeling of judgement. She referred to transgression as consequential of 'not sticking to the rule book' suggesting that guilt can occur when one fails to achieve expected standards of behaviour rather than a transgression-specific offence.

Scaffidi, Misuraca, Roccella, Parisi, Vetri, and Miceli (2022) suggest that empathy is necessary for individuals to evaluate their moral selves both inter-psychically (concerning one's relationships with others) and intra-psychically (in relationship with oneself). The function of the conscience is therefore to maintain homeostasis within one's self-image. However, many of the participants appeared less empathic and more punitive in their self-evaluations when they considered that their behaviour conflicted with their moral standards. In a similar response to Carla, Deborah reported a self-critical and punishing response to her transgression and a desire to change the past:

> I wish I could go back and change but I know I can't. So, I think I kind of look back and beat myself up over it a bit (Deborah).

In fact, many participants described residual and retained emotive responses following a transgression that contravened the doctrines of their faith. These responses ranged from regular reports of shame, guilt, and anxiety but also extended to include experiences of distress and worry. In recognition of her sins, Heather reported feeling anxiety and distress with similar internalisation of guilt to compound her feeling of being a bad person:

> Shame, and guilt, and anxiety, and distress, and worry! Just a real sense of being a bad person (Heather).

Despite the phenomenon pertaining to the feeling of Catholic guilt, the most reported emotive response was one of shame. Indeed, many participants spoke about a discrepancy between their ideal moral self (how one wishes to be perceived within their community of faith) and their real self (who one really is) (Tangney, 1996). The assurance of God's mercy did not appear to reduce this anxiety for Andrew who appeared frustrated that he had succumbed to sin in the first place:

> It's shameful really. Ashamed of myself and although I know God forgives me for it, I still feel shameful and worried because you shouldn't be committing sins in the first place. (Andrew)

Anxiety was not unique to Andrew; it was reported regularly in response to an individual realisation of their human fallibility. Louise disclosed feeling that she inevitably would fall short of being a "good Catholic," and despite recognition of her efforts to try to uphold the moral standards of her faith it was not sufficient to reduce her anxiety, nor was the implication of inevitable failure and lack of personal power enough to diminish her shame:

> So much that I do isn't good enough and although I try really hard to be a good Catholic, I know that I am really lacking. Makes me pretty anxious. (Louise)

Indeed, these reported feelings of guilt, shame, distress, and anxiety as characteristics of the Catholic guilt phenomenon may appear hopeless in the presence of additional feelings of the inevitability of failure and re-offence and the realisation of one's human fallibility. Paul used a metaphor of a car crash to describe the knowledge, yet lack of power to prevent a collision in his description of his inability to prevent his sin:

> It feels inevitable. Like watching a car crash in slow motion. You know you're going to crash but you can't stop yourself. Then there's the embarrassment afterward to all the witnesses to the event. (Paul)

Moreover, Victoria spoke about sitting an exam that she lacked the skills to pass yet having the expectation placed upon her that she ought to be capable of passing it nonetheless:

> It's like sitting an exam that you know you will inevitably fail because you lack the skills to pass, but the examiner telling you that you should be able to pass it anyway. (Victoria)

This led to feelings of defeat and disillusion suggesting that participants feel that Catholic doctrinal expectations are beyond their human capacity. If this is how Catholics experience their humanity it is perhaps little surprise that this phenomenon perpetuates in Catholic followers and as such is likely to reduce the proclivity for self-forgiveness.

Although research suggests that self-conscious emotions such as guilt and shame have less evidence of universality because subjective experiences and their consequences are divergent across cultures (Eid & Deiner, 2001), all participants within this study displayed characteristics of guilt and rumination following a transgression and many disclosed self-punishing behaviour and shame too. This suggests that the phenomenon of Catholic guilt does have similarities in response and experience for Catholic followers.

Atonement and Reckoning

Atonement refers to the requirement for one to be reconciled with God following sin. Essentially, Catholic doctrines teach us that Adam and Eve's decision to sin consequentially made all of humanity objectively guilty before God. Yet, Catholic followers are taught that Jesus' sacrifice of His crucifixion demonstrates that He has atoned for our sins thus, it ought to make sense that despite feeling an inevitability in the likelihood of their tendency to sin,

participants might feel assured of God's grace and forgiveness. Nonetheless, eleven of the twenty participants spoke about an impending day of reckoning, referring to the final judgement of God whereby each person, following death, is called to account for their behaviour in life. The concept of reckoning suggests a calculation or counting process in which human sins on Earth are totalled by God to evaluate one's worthiness of the reward of salvation. In this study, participants reported feeling some trepidation in response to this promise of required atonement which resulted in often conciliatory and sometimes self-deprecating behaviours to reduce their personal perception of debt sin-currency owed to an omnipotent God. Indeed, several participants described this metaphorical tallying and totting up of their every sin. Carol disclosed feeling a sense of being held to account and she exhibited some anxiety and fixation upon maintaining a low transgression count on her metaphorical chart:

> I feel like it will probably go down on some sort of tally chart up above, so I try to keep that tally chart as low as I can because I feel like God is always watching. (Carol)

This perpetual awareness of one's historical sin appeared to lead to a questioning of the repercussions of their failings. Indeed, Carla questioned what her punishment would be likely to be which may appear paranoid or pathological at first glance yet, this viewpoint is supported by Biblical doctrines that suggest that this reckoning is "a day of wrath." (Zephaniah, 1:15).

> I go back to being a child where I try to think of the sins I've committed and tot them up. There's a primitive part of me that thinks, what will be my punishment? (Carla)

This appeared to evoke feelings of fear and distress for individuals with them using often strong and divisive language including that of judgement, punishment, and failure when

speaking about their fear that they may fail to secure a place in heaven. One participant, Louise, described this as a 'terrifying' thought in which she tended to dwell upon questioning whether she could be 'sorry enough' to reconcile with God:

> We are taught that we must repent of our sins to be closer to God and that our sins will be counted at the gates of Heaven. That terrifies me! I often find myself worrying – what if I'm not sorry enough? (Louise)

Thus, it appears that for many participants, the consideration of what will happen after their death was a significant factor in their behaviour in the present moment.

Although participants expressed their faith in the compassion of a forgiving God, there was an emphasis on asking for forgiveness which appeared in conflict with their portrayal of the inescapable and scrutinised surveillance of an omnipotent God. Nigel named this conflict directly in the recalling of his most recent sacrament of reconciliation experience whereby he felt a powerful sense of speaking to Jesus, though his priest, who was 'watching his every move' creating a sense of inescapability of his offences.

> When you talk to the Priest, you are actually talking to Jesus who is watching your every move. (Nigel).

Thus, the awareness of the requirement of atonement on the day of reckoning appeared to instil in participants a sense of anxiety and fear which serve as a proximate cause for prosocial behaviour (Bateson, Nettle, & Gilbert, 2006) intended to improve the sin-currency balance upon God's metaphorical measure of salvation. This sense of being seen by an omnipotent God is likely to reinforce doctrinal behaviours leading one to question whether the portrayal of an omnipotent God is intended as a form of comfort or control.

Inauthentic Practice

Inauthentic practice was an unexpected yet prominent theme within the corpus whereby Catholic followers reported an implicit obligation towards Catholic rituals, recital of prayer, and participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation seemingly without internalisation of these processes and sincerity. Participants spoke candidly about following the rituals of reconciliation without honesty in their admissions to the priest, attending mass as an obligation as opposed to a desire, and reciting prayers without thought.

For some participants, the motivation for mass attendance was consequential of obligation. Mark expressed that he didn't want to go but felt that he must and despite declaring earlier in the interview a sense of belonging experienced from Catholic membership, found it hard to attend the mass itself suggesting that this sense of belonging is not necessarily derived from the practice of faith.

I find it hard to find the motivation to go at all, but you just have to. (Mark)

The Catholic Sacrament of Reconciliation is intended to provide penitents with an opportunity to unburden themselves of their transgressions before God to be absolved of sin and restore them to God's grace. Thus, there is an assumption of honesty in how one might approach this sacrament. The didactic Catholic doctrines teach that absolution by a priest in persona-Christi in concert with a transgressor's contrition objectively expels the guilt that the transgressor had incurred through sin. Yet all participants disclosed less than sincere approaches to this sacrament including rehearsing appropriate (or acceptable) dialogue, selecting lesser sin severity, or even reducing the sum of sins disclosed to three mundane sins. Although there may be logistical reasons for this approach including time-saving and non-remembering, participants themselves recognised that this approach may devalue the

process and its' benefits. For example, Naomi reflected on reconciliation as something that she had to do but didn't take particularly seriously:

> I think it's really lame what you have to share with him. When you think, really? I haven't been for like two years and now I'm going to tell you three things! (Naomi).

Yet, there is an important emotional affect in the recollection of a transgression that may be missed when penitents negate to both recall transgressions and confess them sincerely. Research suggests that it is possible to evoke guilty feelings simply by considering guilt-related scenarios (Baumeister & Exline, 2010), however a neuropsychological study by Mclatchie, Giner-Sorolla, and Derbyshire, (2016) found that the recalling of guilt memories produced significantly more activity in the affective and social cognition structures of the brain compared to merely reading about guilt scenarios. Suggesting that the inauthentic recollection and disclosure of sin is unlikely to foster a sincere emotional and internalisation affect.

This emergent theme within the corpus is confounded in secular research studies too whereby transgressors offer partial confession by imparting only a portion of their wrongdoings to secure moral repair whilst evading the embarrassment or shame anticipated from a full confession (Peer, Aquish, & Shaliv, 2014). Thus, it is not necessarily a behavioural tendency of Catholics alone. Yet, the tendency to approach sacramental reconciliation insincerely may lead one to question whether Catholics can seek redemption if they fail to accept responsibility for their actions. Where Louise reasons that her fear of judgement justifies her selective sin disclosure, the approach is inauthentic, nonetheless.

> I choose what I say to the priest because it's embarrassing. I don't want him to judge me. (Louise)

This leads one to question the benefits of sacramental participation if the intended outcomes are not achievable. Yet, research shows that confession is effective in the reduction of dishonest behaviour, and the restoration of pro-social behaviour following a transgression (Saleam & Moustafa, 2016) suggesting that reconciliation may have a different function than that intended for Catholics.

Where inauthenticity might be explained in part by experiences of discomfort in verbalising one's sins to the priest in persona-Christi, Richard questioned the credibility of kneeling before another adult to achieve forgiveness, and felt some discord at having a human intermediary between himself and God which may contribute to the observed incongruent approach to the Sacrament:

> He's still just a human being, he's not God himself. I feel kind of embarrassed as an adult, kneeling in front of another adult. (Richard)

Another aspect of inauthenticity observed was in the way that Catholic participants spoke about their use of prayers within the liturgy of the mass. Several participants disclosed reciting prayers verbatim and often without thought, reflection, or intention during mass services and following reconciliation suggesting a lack internalisation or sincerity in their approach.

> Where you're going to mass all the time and a Catholic school growing up. You say the words to the prayers, and you don't necessarily think about the meaning behind them. Especially as a kid you don't, you just recite them. (Victoria)

It is important to consider that this may relate to a disconnection with the prayer itself as opposed to one's authentic communication with God. However, it leads us to question the motivation to participate in this ritual if it offers no effective relief.

A final area of inauthenticity was observed in the experiences of Barbara, a divorced woman within the church. Her status as a divorcee, according to Canon Law, excluded her from communion during mass since she was perceived to be in a state of sin, despite having survived an abusive marriage. For Barbara, this created a genuine dissonance between the dishonest receiving of communion, or in her abstinence, the perceived consequential disclosure of her sins to other parishioners and the assumed judgment that may arise from this.

> I left an abusive and unfaithful marriage and as a result, I was a divorcee which means that I shouldn't receive the Eucharist each week because I am in a state of sin. During that time, I received it anyway and I was a bit dishonest in not disclosing my status to the Priest. For me, not receiving it would have been even more shame evoking because by my abstinence others would know I was a sinner. (Barbara)

In this circumstance, insincerity was a response to feelings of shame from the perceived judgement of others, which led to receiving the Eucharist whilst in a state of sin. This is perhaps where the themes of inauthenticity and religious motivation orientation intersect.

Religious motivation orientation

Religious motivation orientation describes the source in which individuals experience the motivation to practice their faith. Where extrinsic orientation refers to the external benefits of one's faith including feelings of belonging and community, intrinsic orientation pertains to the implicit and internalised aspects of one's beliefs, spirituality, and values (King & Crowther, 2004). In this study, all participants reported experiencing a state of belonging within the church itself and the church community and considered their faith to be an important part of their lives. This might be indicative of both intrinsic and extrinsic religious

motivation since the former would demonstrate the internalised and implicit feelings evoked in church belonging whereas the latter might be consequential of the parish community and practice. For some participants like Andrew, church membership was an active and conscious process.

> I want to be part of the church and community. I think belonging has always been important to me. (Andrew)

Yet, regular mass attendance amongst participants which might enhance this sense of belonging was also expressed as an obligatory action resultant from both the perceived judgement from others and cheating God.

> I have to go to church, or it's cheating God. (Mark)

Moreover, missing mass was expressed as a serious transgression by some with participation as a result of religious obligation rather than wanting to attend. Carol rated this non-attendance transgression to be in concert with the sins of murder and 'viciousness' suggesting that she perceives this transgression to be a moral, erroneous sin.

> Sin is missing mass on a Sunday and killing somebody, and actually being really vicious and denying God in that sort of order. (Carol)

Despite this prominent feeling of belonging some participants spoke of feeling judged by other parishioners within their church. Barbara spoke poignantly about her status as a survivor of domestic abuse and her subsequent divorce. She disclosed an intrinsic motivation whereby she had found attending church during this period of her life to be restorative in providing her a place of solace. However, her feeling of belonging was also marred with shame in her status as a divorcee which put her at odds with the doctrines of her faith and evoked fear of being ostracised from the church community and judged by other parishioners.

> I carried so much shame for such a long time, I didn't want to tell people I was a divorcee. (Barbara)

Additionally, Barbara felt torn between following Canon Law to remain married to her abusive husband or, leaving to protect herself. This unenviable dilemma resulted in the internalised conflict of disappointing God and other people within her life or keeping herself safe. She perceived these two states to be at odds with each other despite the idea of God expecting her to remain in an unsafe environment being in contradiction with her expression of a loving and benevolent God.

> I felt completely torn between staying in an abusive marriage to keep the Catholic rules, or to leave. When I chose to leave, I felt incredibly guilty, that I'd let everyone down, especially my parents and God. (Barbara)

Some participants spoke about their perpetual struggle to achieve doctrinal standards of behaviour and the frustration borne of this state. Carol reported feeling frustrated that these desired standards were unattainable yet strived towards them nonetheless creating a sense of uselessness. In her call to God 'what do you expect from me?" it appears that she believes these doctrines to be God's decree rather than Canon law suggesting that for Catholics the two may be indistinguishable.

> I feel useless sometimes. I feel annoyed and frustrated because I want to say to Him 'what do you expect from me? I can't do all this. It's too difficult! (Carol)

Many participants spoke about an obligation to attend sacramental reconciliation despite also feeling a sense of reluctance. One participant jovially disclosed that he felt that he had to attend because another parishioner knew when he had failed to go at Easter and had

challenged him on it. He felt that it had been important the next time that he went that he saw the other parishioner to confirm his attendance.

> This guy in my church, George is really devout. He goes to everything. He sits in front of me in church so I see him pretty much every week. If I don't go he asks me where I've been (laughs). Last Easter I didn't go to confession because…….well I was busy. George said to me at mass on Sunday 'I didn't see you at confession yesterday….' He's on it. He knows! So, I went to the next one and made sure I saw him there.

Yet, if one does not participate in the sacrament of reconciliation sincerely such as, having a genuine inclination to attend or honestly admitting the extent of one's transgressions, it suggests that sacramental attendance serves an extrinsic purpose.

Self-unforgiveness

Self-unforgiveness describes the difficulty that Catholic individuals have in reaching a state of self-forgiveness. The principle of self-forgiveness describes a process in which negatively self-directed emotions such as shame and guilt are reduced in favour of acceptance and culpability for one's transgressions (Fisher & Exline, 2010). The Catholic Church tends to promote both divine and interpersonal forgiving behaviours as important characteristics of the faith. Furthermore, forgiveness is taught within Catholicism as a relational phenomenon that can be achieved either interpersonally or through divine grace. Yet, there are no doctrines to support self-forgiveness or the relationship with oneself, although divine forgiveness might be seen to be a precursor to self-forgiveness

Participants when asked about self-forgiveness were often unable to draw upon subjective experiences or describe the emotional and affective impact of the phenomenon. Furthermore, they were unable to recognise or recall any religious doctrines to support the

process of self-forgiveness. Heather described this as a “great gap” for herself and disclosed that she would have liked to have reached a point where she could use scripture to support the process for it to be possible for her

> I couldn’t quote any scriptures to you that talk about self-forgiveness whereas I could find plenty of other types, so that’s a great gap for me personally. (Heather)

However, Richard questioned the validity of the concept of self-forgiveness suggesting that for him as a follower of Catholicism this phenomenon was not an achievable state since it cannot be self-awarded:

> If you’ve got that faith and you’re following it, then self-forgiveness is not really a thing that you can bestow on yourself. (Richard)

Furthermore, some participants argued that self-forgiveness leaves penitents without responsible culpability following an offence meaning that one can sin freely in the knowledge that they can offer themselves a reprieve. In this respect, Catholic forgiveness ought to hold one accountable in the presence of another which suggests an externalised relational process. Indeed, Andrew considered self-forgiveness not only to be irrelevant but that it provided sinners with a "free ticket" to sin again which appears to exclude the characteristic of forgiveness that individuals learn from their mistakes:

> Forgiving yourself if like giving yourself a free ticket to do it over and over again. You have to feel indebted so that you are constantly accountable. (Andrew)

Some participants questioned their deservingness of forgiveness in any state and, although they reported believing that God will forgive them, they found it difficult to move on following a transgression and continued to act punitively towards themselves. Naomi reflected on the concept of faith: that one cannot know that they are forgiven, they must believe it which may be in contradiction with how she felt about her offence:

> You don't really know that God has forgiven you do you? You just have to believe that He will, but it's a hard thing to do when you think that you are unworthy of it. (Naomi)

One participant, Rosemary, spoke about her imagination of what self-forgiveness might feel like in which she imagined a release from God catalysing her self-forgiveness. Thus, even in these hypothetical circumstances, self-forgiveness appears to be only experienced relationally.

> I imagine that it feels like a sense of peace and letting go. That God has released you from your penance. (Rosemary)

This was confirmed by Richard who spoke about a hypothetical feeling of moving on in which divine forgiveness was the precursor. Yet, he reported having no experience of this.

> I guess self-forgiveness is almost a process that you go through to move on. Divine forgiveness might feel like a weight lifted, it might be a physical feeling as well. I don't know, an emotional feeling as well, like that heaviness is lifted. (Richard)

This may suggest that self-forgiveness is irrelevant within the Catholic faith (Vitz & Meade, 2011), or perhaps it is reframed as the acceptance of divine forgiveness and God's grace which is received relationally rather than as an internalised process.

The lack of scriptural doctrines to support self-forgiving behaviours appear to reduce its implied importance amongst followers, and these qualitative findings suggest that Catholics do not believe that self-forgiveness is possible at all. This will need to be addressed in the second part of this study.

Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is an important part of the process of thematic analysis in exploring how one's subjectivity is existent in the process and thus potentially impacting the research and findings (Willig, 2021). A reflexive approach involves acknowledging the role and position of the researcher in the process of creating meaning rather than ascribing to an assumption of researcher objectivity (Finlay & Gough, 2003).

I, the researcher, am a cradle-Catholic. I was born and raised Catholic and continue to practice my faith regularly in mass attendance and service within the Catholic community. Whilst recognising that this leaves the research susceptible to researcher bias, it has also facilitated a phenomenological and experiential insight into the lived experiences of Catholic followers. To improve my objectivity within the analysis of the data I spoke to a Catholic priest and then to a Baptist minister to aid in my understanding of Christian doctrines and address any misconceptions that I may hold myself. This was an ongoing process of consultation as themes emerged that were unexpected or conflicted with my understanding of Christian practice.

At the time of conducting this research, I was a psychotherapist working in a Christian counselling agency proving therapy for a wide range of client pathologies. Recurring themes for many of my Catholic clients were both shame and guilt following what they considered to be poor life decisions, immoral actions, or unacceptable behaviours in line with their faith. Often these clients had received the Sacrament of reconciliation, attended mass services, recited the penitential act, and made a genuine attempt to make reparation. Even after all of these steps they still tended towards rumination and self-contempt. I questioned therefore what purpose these rituals had if they didn't bring about relief.

The Catholic Church uses recital of prayer and creed to instil the doctrines of the faith. This has sometimes led me to feel a sense of distancing between myself and my

relationship with God. I have questioned why there is a need for an intermediary between myself and God if He sees and hears all that I do and all that I am. This process of reciting and adhering has felt to be an externalised process whereby expectation of behaviour is inextricably connected to belonging. In recognising the parallel process involved in my own experience of faith and that of my clients, I spoke to my research supervisor and to a research fellow to explore whether these subjective experiences could be objectively explored as a psychological phenomenon. I was encouraged to draw upon my psychotherapeutic knowledge, applying a Person-Centred theoretical perspective to allow me to distance myself from the research question which led to the research title ‘do Catholics have an external locus of evaluation?’ To answer this, I needed to consider what the emotive experiences of Catholics were following a transgression including understanding how religious practices contribute to forgiving behaviours and how self-forgiveness may be experienced and expressed.

I had anticipated Catholic Guilt to be a prominent theme of the research since this is central to my own experience and understanding of Catholicism and the concept of Catholic guilt is a widely accepted phenomenon. However, I hadn't considered that the prescriptive nature of Catholic practices could result in insincerity in one's approach to them. This was perhaps a blind spot for me.

Lastly, from a psychotherapeutic perspective, the role of self-forgiveness is an important aspect of shame recovery and thus, it was a central part of this research. If self-forgiveness is the antidote to shame and guilt, then the pursuit of self-forgiveness ought to be paramount. Yet, Catholicism focuses on both divine and interpersonal forgiveness and precludes self-forgiveness thus, this presents a gap in the practices of this phenomenon. Speaking to both a Catholic priest and a Baptist minister revealed an assertion that self-forgiveness is unnecessary for Christians since it cannot happen in the absence of divine

forgiveness. Furthermore, for an individual to hold a grudge against oneself after they have sought divine forgiveness would be to assert that one is greater than God. If God can forgive the individual, but they cannot forgive themselves then one is saying that their judgement is truer than God's. These were new perspectives for me and therefore required me to research this perspective more deeply.

Discussion: Study 1

Analysis of the corpus revealed five prominent themes, a) Catholic guilt, b) atonement and reckoning, c) inauthentic practice, d) religious motivation orientation, and e) self-unforgiveness.

Catholic guilt

As anticipated, experiences of guilt were reported by all individuals during the interview however, this emotion was not always in response to transgression. Some participants disclosed experiencing guilt in their human fallibility and failure to achieve Christ-like standards of behaviour. This guilt-response to the violation of their internalised religious and moral standards was resultant of negative introjected moral self-evaluations whereby participants referred to themselves as 'bad' or 'useless.' These feelings were used to justify self-unforgiving behaviour and exacerbated the feeling of unworthiness of divine forgiveness. These responses appear to be consistent with Sheldon's (2006) definition of Catholic guilt as a generalised proclivity to experience guilt and angst for sins received or inconsequential. Furthermore, the research of Inbar, Pizaro, Gilovich, and Ariely (2012) found that feeling guilty was correlated with self-punishment.

Indeed, guilt-laden people can tolerate a greater degree of aversive experiences when feeling guilty (Bastian, Jetten, & Fasoli, 2011). Yet, guilt may be characterised not only by

the responsibility for wrongdoing but also by the pro-social motivation for reparation (Gino & Pierce, 2009). In this study, although participants reported conciliatory responses, these were rarely directed towards authentic reparation. For most participants, transgressions were followed by rumination and self-criticism which were exacerbated by demotivation, symptomatic of the realisation of the inevitability of their re-offending and their human imperfection. These characteristics appear more consistent with self-pity (Stober, 2003) or despair, as opposed to Catholic guilt. Though many participants disclosed feeling bad about their transgressions only a few disclosed seeking reconciliation from those they had wronged, making amends, or undertaking works to redress their offences. This is consistent with the research of Woodyatt and Wenzel (2013) who found that self-punitive reactions correlated significantly with avoidance and other negative outcomes.

Additionally, shame was a prominent emotion expressed by participants, especially in recognition of their transgressions. This emotion is correlated with public exposure of one's offences and the fear of others' moral disapprobation (Smith, Webster, Parrot, & Eyre, 2002). Yet shame was expressed in an equivalent way to guilt with penitents utilising this emotion as a response to their imperfection, describing themselves as intrinsically shameful, or a perpetual sinner and taking on shame as part of their identity. Yet, shame is not always symptomatic of a polarised self-view, it may instead be limited to isolated transgressions (Gausel, Vignoles, & Leach, 2016) including: hurting others, doing something which contravenes one's faith, and failing to adhere to religious practices, as inferred by the participants of this study.

Thus, participants within this study did demonstrate characteristics of the Catholic guilt phenomenon and many appeared to be in an eternal state of guilt resultant from perceived impossible ascribed standards and human imperfection. However, it appears that participants actively encourage this self-critical presentation, perhaps because it perpetuates

an ontologically internalised identity of piety or to uphold themselves as moral people (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Yet, if this guilt cannot be relieved it is likely to inhibit the propensity to achieve self-forgiveness.

Atonement and reckoning

Participants reported feeling accountable to an all-knowing, omnipotent God, as described by the supernatural monitoring theory (Johnson & Kruger, 2004). Participants spoke of both the fear of retribution from an omnipotent and omniscient God which compelled them to adhere to moral boundaries in response to perceived theistic observation and thus toward compliant and prosocial behaviour (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). For many participants, this resulted in the expression of fear or anxiety and a perceived dependency upon the final judgment of God as the place to receive absolution rather than from an internal position. This is consistent with religious scrupulosity (Wang, Kang, Lee, & Sipan, 2021) in which religious followers experience a fear of moral transgressions in the eyes of an all-knowing God. Consequentially religiously scrupulous individuals perform overt ritualistic behaviours that are perceived to moderate the effect of the moral transgression whilst increasing one's perceived piety (Draper, 2021).

Additionally, some participants expressed their anxiety in metaphor depicting a metaphorical transgression balance sheet utilised by God to determine their deservingness of salvation. Although this may appear to be pathological in nature it is well represented in Biblical scripture, for example, Leviticus (16:21-22) writes about the ritual sacrificing of a goat which is presented metaphorically as carrying the burden of Israel's sin into the wilderness. Furthermore, sin reduction also has Biblical foundations with a metaphor of sin-currency in which moral debts can be repaid or can even accumulate merit. Thus, since scripture may be seen to support this transactional view of atonement it is unsurprising that

Catholics ascribe to this belief. Indeed, Sachdeva, Iliev, and Medin (2009) found that religious individuals believe that prior good deeds can help to redress their moral balance sheet consequentially and diminish the perceived threat to their self-value.

The presentation of an omnipotent and judgemental God appears at odds with the Christian presentation of a God who loved the world so much that He sacrificed His only son to atone for all men's sins. Thus, it would be valuable for further research to explore how God-image might influence self-forgiveness.

Self-unforgiveness

Research findings were largely consistent with the expectation that the absence of didactic, biblical doctrines of self-forgiveness, may inhibit the phenomenon. No participants spoke about self-forgiveness experiences, and many were only able to hypothesise as to what it might entail. Furthermore, some participants questioned the relevance of the phenomenon suggesting that forgiveness may only be achieved relationally such as by divine or interpersonal means. Consequentially, the emotive response could not be garnered leading one to question whether Catholics believe that self-forgiveness was possible at all. This provided an important direction for the second study.

Conversely, Anderson (2007) argues that forgiveness is essentially relational in nature and as such may only be achieved in relationships with others. This has been described metaphorically as horizontal forgiveness, relating to the independent relationship between all humans and the need for forgiveness to maintain harmony, and vertical forgiveness, pertaining to the relationship with God and His divine mercy. As such, there is no relational position for self-forgiveness which might provide insight into why Catholic individuals felt unable to self-forgive and were unable to recall a time where self-forgiveness had been experienced. Yet, with no doctrines to support self-forgiveness rather than to question

whether it inhibits the process, or even if it is possible, it may be more appropriate to ask whether it is relevant for Christians. Indeed, Vitz and Meade (2010) consider the phenomenon theologically incorrect for this reason, a position that appears to be supported by the participants of this study.

Inauthentic practice

Inauthenticity of religious practice was identified specifically in the insincerity with which penitents approached the Sacrament of Reconciliation in conjunction with the recital of penitential prayers by rote, with some participants describing a process of articulating the words to prayers without internalising meaning. This may have important ramifications for penitents since it is this sincerity with which one approaches the penitential act that allows Catholics to be absolved of sin so that one may receive the Eucharist. Furthermore, this inauthenticity was evident in Catholic approaches to Sacramental reconciliation in the form of sin severity reduction, rehearing transgression disclosure, and selective disclosure of erroneous sins. Indeed, one might question the motivation to participate in such practices if no relief is gleaned.

Analysis suggests that the reconciliatory responses themselves may contribute to this inauthenticity with individuals questioning the necessity for a priest, in persona-Christi, as an intermediary between themselves and God, and embarrassment in the declaration of one's sins before another fallible human. Furthermore, the requirement that sinners confess their transgressions aloud may also contribute to experiences of moral shame (Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Murray-Swank, 2003) and dissuade authentic participation.

Although Catholic individuals did disclose guilt and shame responses to their transgressions providing support for the Catholic guilt phenomenon the lack of doctrines to support self-forgiving practices serves to inhibit self-forgiveness in doctrinaire followers.

Participants ascribe to the perception of an omnipotent and omniscient God who measures one's atonement by the number of sins committed. Yet, this self-critical, pious fear of retribution does not translate to all Catholic practices, moreover, one might argue that where it matters most, in the practice of penance and reconciliation, this aspect of Catholic practice appears to be insincere which is likely to perpetuate the state of sin. Yet, if no relief is garnered from reconciliatory practice, there must be other contributing factors that motivate followers to participate. If Catholics believe that God will forgive them, perhaps this involves more private, less prescriptive communication with God whereby the extent of one's transgression is acknowledged and known.

Religious motivation

Analysis indicated that Catholics considered their faith to be fundamental to their lives, reporting feeling a sense of belonging and community though few referred to positive feelings in the practice of their faith suggesting that this sense of belonging might be derived from extrinsic religious motivation and the social implications of group belonging. Moreover, when individuals felt in concordance with the doctrines of their faith there was a tendency to feel judged or alienated from other believers. Where one participant spoke of non-adherence to Canon Law in their marital status it had considerable social consequences in preventing them from accessing and participating in the Eucharistic part of the mass, ironically utilised to restore followers to God's grace.

The function of religion in group belonging is well established in research (Zhang, Hook, Farrell, Mosher, Van Tongeren, Davis, 2018) thus, it is unsurprising that the participants reported feeling a sense of belonging in their church community and in contrast a feeling of judgement in the wake of a perceived public transgression such as that of divorce

which may equate to extrinsic religious motivation. Yet, there was evidence of both intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation in their accounts of their Catholic practice.

Extrinsic religious orientation was observed in the ritualised and prescriptive nature of the practice of participants' faith, particularly in the recital of prayer and their approach to the Sacrament of reconciliation. Many reported feeling a sense of obligation to participate in these rituals despite an insincerity of approach including reciting prayers without internalisation of meaning or communication with God, and the dishonest recollection of sins in the sacrament of reconciliation. Furthermore, many reported feeling a sense of anxiety and distress in these practices which perhaps leads one to question the value of participation if not gleaned for sincere purposes. Perhaps, where there is a culture of contrite accountability there may be an expectation in collective faiths that all are held to account by both the group and by God. Indeed, it could be argued that religions such as Catholicism with their rigid parameters of practice construct these parameters to uphold a conservative value system in which adherence is emphasised (Terrizzi, Shook, & Ventis, 2012).

In sum, Catholic guilt and inauthenticity of religious practice were the most prominent themes of the corpus. Together these themes present quite a paradox, guilt felt as a response to one's transgressions and insincerity in their approach to seeking redemption and absolution. It would be fair to assume that these conflicting positions for Catholics might serve to inhibit their propensity to self-forgive since an insincere apology may not relieve genuine guilt. No participants reported experiences of self-forgiveness which appeared to be consequential of perceived of theological irrelevance as opposed to guilt. For most participants, forgiveness can only be achieved relationally through God and each other and is impossible without. Thus, at the interface of psychology and theology, it may be important to

ask whether Catholics believe that self-forgiveness is possible at all and what the implications of this may be.

Study 2

The link between religion and forgiveness is well documented since the phenomenon has a strong theological aetiology across religions. Although it might be reasonable to expect that the representation of a loving forgiving God in concert with the promotion of forgiveness (Davis, Worthington, Hook & Hill, 2013) is also likely to encourage self-forgiveness, recent research may suggest otherwise (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Enright, Gassin and Wu (1992), the challenge may lie in whether one is able to not only appreciate the necessity for forgiveness, but also understand what it might entail. Thus, with a lack of Catholic doctrines to promote self-forgiving behaviour, this may have grave consequences for its practice.

The literature review presented within the introduction demonstrated that there are some key areas of divergence in the way that Catholics and Protestants practice and internalise their faith. Where Protestants reject the necessity for an intermediary between themselves and God, Catholic practices such as the sacrament of reconciliation are mediated through priests *in persona-Christi* which may at least in part transform the deeply intrapersonal act of confession and reconciliation, to an interpersonal act of sin recollection and confession. Furthermore, the penance with which Catholics atone for their sins is awarded by the priest who assesses the severity of one's disclosed sins against the quantity of prayers prescribed.

In study 1 Catholic participants disclosed an insincerity with which they approached Sacramental reconciliation and the recital of prayer, though many participated nonetheless suggesting that adherence to these rituals may have other functions for Catholics. Although the Bible provides scripture for all Christian followers, the consumption and practice of the doctrines of Christianity are expressed differently between Christian denominations. Where Protestantism rejects Sacerdotalism and has very few rituals imposed to earn grace and forgiveness, Catholics believe that salvation is achieved and upheld through sacramental participation that serve as channels of grace. The emphasis on works and penance as a form of reconciling followers to God's grace was evidenced in the discourse of participants in Study 1. Thus, the literature review and the findings of Study 1 taken together suggest that Protestants and Catholics may place different emphasis on the value and feedback gleaned from others in pursuit of self-forgiveness. Indeed, where Catholic reconciliation and self-forgiveness appear to be interpersonal practices, the lack of requirement for Protestants to follow similar rituals is likely to result in intrapersonal practice instead. Therefore, the locus of evaluation inventory was added to Study 2 to test whether Catholic followers orientated more towards an external locus of evaluation than Protestant followers.

An unexpected finding of Study 1 was that Catholic participants reported feeling unable to self-forgive. For some, this was consequential of rumination and self-condemnation in the wake of a transgression, but many participants questioned whether self-forgiveness was theologically correct suggesting that forgiveness could only be achieved either vertically (from God) or horizontally (from others). A literature review revealed that there were no Biblical or doctrinal teachings pertaining to self-forgiveness and indeed, no participants in Study 1 were able to draw upon implicit scripture to support the practice of the phenomenon. Thus, following Study 1 it was unclear whether self-forgiveness is a state that Catholic

individuals' feel able to achieve, or even whether self-forgiveness may be considered something to aspire to at all.

The consequential state of self-unforgiveness may also relate to the expression and experience of Catholic guilt. This widely accepted phenomenon in which Catholic individuals experience pathological and maladaptive guiltiness and anxiety following a transgression (or merely in recognition of one's fallibility) was a dominant theme in Study 1 whereby all participants reported feeling guilt and failure in living up to the standards of their faith. Although a literature review demonstrated that this phenomenon of Catholic guilt is not necessarily limited only to Catholics, it has been demonstrated that Catholics appear to be motivated to present themselves as objectively guilty (Lindsay-Hartz, 1984) which was also observed in the participants of Study 1.

Although Catholic guilt was a dominant theme for Study 1, there are no associated measures specifically associated with this phenomenon. Instead, in response to the findings of Study 1, Study 2 used the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (specifically the subscale of Self-Forgiveness) to test whether Catholic individuals reported self-forgiving behaviours. Additional questions were also written to ask participants directly whether they felt self-forgiveness was possible and to rate its importance against other types of forgiveness (divine and interpersonal). Considering the literature review and findings of Study 1, it was expected that Catholic individuals would demonstrate less propensity for self-forgiveness than Protestants since the Catholic tendency towards Catholic guilt, the emphasis on penance and works, and the use of a priest as an intermediary between Catholic followers and God might influence them towards the primacy of divine forgiveness as opposed to self-forgiveness.

In recognition of the differences in Catholic and Protestant approaches to the practices of their faith as discussed within the introduction, this study compared Catholic and Christian non-Catholic samples (IV) in: forgiving behaviours (DV1) using the Heartland Forgiveness Scale, locus of evaluation (DV2) using the Locus of Evaluation Inventory, experiences of self-forgiveness (DV3) using direct questioning with binary responses, and forgiveness type priority (DV2) using ranked priority questioning.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were presented:

1. Catholic individuals will demonstrate a more tendency towards an external locus of evaluation than Christian non-Catholic individuals.
2. Catholic individuals will demonstrate less self-forgiveness than Christian non-Catholic individuals.
3. Catholic individuals will report self-forgiveness to be of least importance in the forgiveness tripartite (self, divine, interpersonal) compared to Christian non-Catholic individuals.

Methodology

The themes explored within Study 1 appeared to suggest not just a reduced proclivity towards self-forgiveness in Catholic participants as anticipated but also that many individuals either had never experienced self-forgiveness or did not believe that it was possible at all. Thus, for Study 2, it was necessary to directly ask these questions to compound these findings and ensure accuracy of the thematic analysis. Furthermore, the Catholic participants in Study

1 disclosed a lack of Christian doctrines to support self-forgiving behaviours due to their assertion that forgiveness was achievable only through sacramental participation. This is a different approach to Protestantism where forgiveness does not need to be earnt but is given freely (Ganiel & Yohanis, 2022). The Bible is a shared amongst all Christians and thus, it might be expected that if it is a reliance upon scripture to guide forgiveness practices that inhibits self-forgiveness this effect would be reproduced amongst all Christian populations. The research design in Study 2 was therefore modified to allow for two samples: one Catholic and one Christian non-Catholic to explore this assumption.

Additionally, there appeared to be an inauthenticity in which Catholics approached sacramental reconciliation and the ritualised practice of prayer. This led to the question: Why do Catholics participate in these rituals if the desired effect is not achieved? In responding reflexively, the Locus of Evaluation Inventory was added to Study 2 to explore whether Catholic individuals demonstrate a reliance upon the judgement and feedback of others to derive self-value.

Participants and Sample Size Calculation

The study compared two samples: Catholic and Christian non-Catholic. To be eligible to participate, participants were required to reside in the UK, to be over the age of 18 and have an affiliation to of one of these faiths.

Assuming equal group allocation and .8 power to detect a moderate effect size d=0.4 (two tailed) at the standard 0.05 alpha error probability (Jones, 2003), the sample size required was calculated at 200 (100 per group). However, to mitigate for a pre-screening anomaly in the disproportionate recruitment of female participants, an additional 39 participants were recruited, resulting in a total sample n=239.

Materials

Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson, Snyder, & Hoffman, 2005)

The scale comprises 18 statements rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*almost always false of me*) to 7 (*almost always true of me*). The overall scale is split into three six-item subscales with questions pertaining to: self-forgiveness (e.g., *Learning from bad things that I've done helps me get over them*), interpersonal forgiveness (e.g., *With time I am understanding of others for the mistakes they've made*), and situational forgiveness, respectively (e.g., *I eventually make peace with bad situations in my life*.). Higher scores implied a greater proclivity for forgiveness in each trait response subscales. Each subscale has three items reverse coded on the Likert scale (e.g.,7=1, 6=2) to control for acquiescent bias. For the Self-forgiveness subscale items 2, 4, and 6 are reverse coded, for Interpersonal forgiveness subscale items 7, 9, and 11 are reverse coded, and in the Situational forgiveness subscale items 13, 15, and 17 are reverse coded (see Appendix E). Thompson et al., (2005) reported good internal consistency for the overall scale and subscales, respectively. Furthermore, test-retest reliability was reported to be .82 over 3 a week test interval, and Cronbach's alphas ranging between .84 and .87 for the total scale score (Edwards, Roberts, Clarke, DiGuiseppi, Pratap, Wentz, 2002).

The Locus of Evaluation Inventory (Burcur, 2007)

This scale comprises 25 statements rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The 25-statement scale has four subscales which pertain to the factors which contribute to ones' Locus of Evaluation orientation. Low Self-Regard contributes 7 statements (e.g., *It is hard for me to accept positive feedback from myself*), Concern for others opinions contributes 8 statements (e.g., *What others think of me is important*), Dependence contributes 5 statements (e.g., *I usually follow what others' want me to do*), and Public Self

Consciousness contributes the final 5 statements (e.g., *I feel worthless when I feel that I've disappointed someone*). Scores on each item indicate an internal locus of evaluation where the value is less than 3 (with 1 being the most internal presentation) and values higher than 3 indicate an external locus of evaluation (with 6 being the most external presentation). Thus, combined higher scores imply an external locus of evaluation and lower score the converse. Three items (items 9, 10 and 13) are reverse scored to control for acquiescence bias (e.g., 6=1, 5=2) (See Appendix D). Burcur (2007) reported adequate internal consistency for the scale (.88) and test-retest reliability was reported at .81 between Times 1 and 2.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via Prolific, an online platform that matches participants against study requirements utilizing the demographic registration information. For this study participants were pre-screened by Prolific for: country of residence (UK only), religious affiliation (Christianity only), Christianity affiliation (including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Independent, United Reformed, New Churches, Orthodox and Pentecostal), and participation in religious activities (both public and private).

The questionnaire was delivered using the Qualtrics platform via Prolific, which enabled every part of the participation process to be included. Individuals participated in all parts of the study which involved the following process (*see Table 1*): participant information (Appendix A), informed consent (Appendix B), participant ID formulation (to allow redaction of responses whilst maintaining anonymity), demographic data collection (including a re-check for religious affiliation), The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Appendix E); The Locus of Evaluation Scale (Appendix D), Independent Questions (Appendix F), and then Participant Debrief.

Participants were assigned groups (Catholic or Christian non-Catholic) at data analysis stage according to their response to the religious affiliation question. Following successful recruitment of the required sample size, data were analysed using Jamovi v 1.8.4. (See Table 5 for the procedural framework for recruitment, data collection and data analysis for Study 2).

Table 5:

Procedural framework for recruitment, data collection and data analysis for Study 2

Stage	Procedure
Prolific recruitment Sample size = 207 (.8 power, d = 0.4 (two-tailed), .05 alpha error),	• Sample demographics = Christian, over 18, UK resident religious participation. • Controlled for religious affiliation in four waves of recruitment to ensure equality of dichotomised study sample. • 7 participants excluded due to non-Christianity.
Sampling Anomaly Prolific alert to anomaly in sampling (less than 25% male). Additional recruitment N=40	• Male only participants with existing demographics. • Controlled for equality of religious affiliation (Catholic N=25, non-Catholic N=15). • 1 excluded (failed attention checks).
Examination of outliers in Dependent Variables Heartland Forgiveness Scale Locus of Evaluation Inventory	• Box plots and Shapiro-Wilkes for Dependent Variables. • HFS Subscale, interpersonal forgiveness had 2 outliers below the interquartile range with significant Shapiro-Wilkes. • Decision made not to remove (between 1.5 and 3 times the interquartile range and do not affect direction of data).
Data analysis Independent *t*-test Religious affiliation	• Religious affiliation (Independent Variable) – two groups of Catholic and non-Catholic Christian. • Locus of evaluation (Dependent Variable 1) • Forgiveness (Dependent Variable 2)
Data analysis Pearson's Correlation Religious practice	• Religious practice (Independent Variable) - six groups pertaining to frequency of attendance (1 = never, 6 = four or more times per week). • Locus of evaluation (Dependent variable 1) • Forgiveness (Dependent variable 2)
Data analysis	• Experiences of self-forgiveness (Independent variable) – two groups (yes/no)

Independent *t*-test Experiences of self-forgiveness	• Locus of evaluation (Dependent variable 1) • Forgiveness (Dependent variable 2) • Chi square test of association • Bonferroni corrections for multiple comparisons
Data analysis Descriptive statistics Forgiveness types	• Mean allocation of the division of 100 points between three types of forgiveness (divine forgiveness, self-forgiveness, forgiveness of others). • Comparison of Catholic and non-Catholic Christians • 27 (11%) excluded from data analysis due to misunderstanding of the question or missing data. • Chi square test of association
Data analysis Study 1 and Study 2 incongruence Analysis of test subscales	• Independent t-test analysis of Heartland Forgiveness and Locus of Evaluation subscales. • Religious affiliation (Dependent Variable) • Forgiveness subscales – Self forgiveness (Independent Variable 1), Interpersonal forgiveness (Independent Variable 2), Situational forgiveness (Independent variable 3). • Locus of evaluation subscales – Low self-regard (Independent Variable 4), Concern for others' opinions (Independent Variable 5), Dependence (Independent Variable 6), Public Self-Consciousness (Independent Variable 7). • Bonferroni corrections for multiple comparisons.

Note. Recruitment: Prolific platform. Data Collection: Qualtrics platform for survey distribution. Data Analysis: Unpaired *t*-Tests using Jamovi v. 1.8.4.4
N=239

Data Analysis

To collect data on individuals' attitudes researchers frequently use Likert scales such as those found in the Heartland Forgiveness Scale and Locus of Evaluation Inventory. Yet, Coomb's Theory of Data (1964) would consider Likert data to be ordinal and thus, this presents a challenge for a descriptive analysis since it violates the assumptions of continuous data required for *t*-test analysis. However, this may depend upon the number of rating scales categories each scale employs. Bollon (1989) asserts that rating scales with more than five categories can be classified as interval data, and thus the scales used in this study with (7 and 6 ratings respectively) may be considered interval.

Therefore, data collected from these two scales were analysed using unpaired *t*-tests to test the significance between the two groups (Catholic and Christian non-Catholic). Following this, additional unpaired *t*-tests were used to identify individual differences between subscales. To support the accuracy of this decision, skewness and kurtosis of the data were scrutinized since excessive skewness and kurtosis may result when ordinal data are classified as interval (Bollon, 1989).

Results

Data were analysed from an initial sample of 207 participants. Of these, seven participants were excluded from final data analysis because, despite utilising Prolific's sample parameters to capture only a Christian sample, these participants indicated either an alternative faith or an atheist belief. Following this, we were alerted by Prolific to an anomaly in their user sampling process which resulted in an unacceptably disproportionate gender sample of less than 25% male participants within the study sample. Therefore, a further 40 male participants were recruited which were weighted (25 Catholic, 15 Protestant) with the first wave of data to appropriately balance the sample of Catholic and Protestant (see Table

5). This additional recruitment improved the male ratio to 35.5% (male=85, female=154). Although underrepresented the male sample was deemed adequate nonetheless since gender was not a focal point of the current research. Furthermore, research indicates that women are more religious than men (Penny, Francis, & Robbins, 2015; Loewenthal, MacLeod, & Cinnirella, 2002) which might explain the greater female response rate.

Of the 40 participants in the second wave of recruitment, one failed the two attention checks within the study whereby the statement *"I am paying attention to this questionnaire"* required them to answer, *"always true of me."* This participant did not tick the required answer in both attention questions and further checks demonstrated acquiescence bias (the tendency to agree with all statements) and thus their results were excluded from the final data. This resulted in a final sample of 239 participants.

The data were analysed using Jamovi v 1.8.4., and independent samples *t*-tests were used for analysis. The scale of measurement for each dependent variable (Heartland Forgiveness Scale and Locus of Evaluation Inventory) were continuous and measured at interval level. The Independent Variable for each test were categorical and represented dichotomous ordinal variables with two assigned levels, and there existed independence of observations between the groups compared.

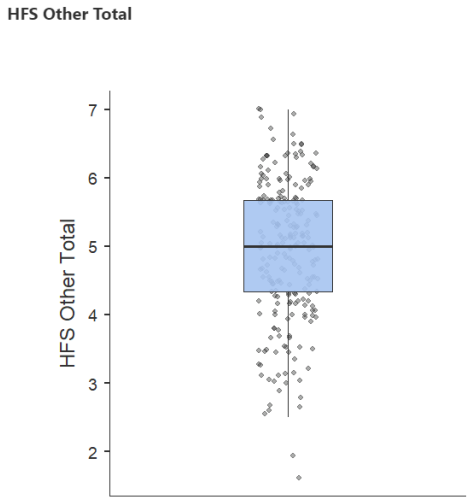
The existence of outliers for each dependent variable was assessed via scrutiny of boxplots (fig. 1). Except for one subscale, no values exceeded 1.5 times the interquartile range (IQR) and Shapiro-Wilkes tests were not significant (> p=.05).

Scores on The Heartland Forgiveness subscale, interpersonal forgiveness, had two outliers which were 1.5 times below the interquartile range (Q1=4.33; Q3=5.67. m=5.00) and the Shapiro-Wilke test of normality was significant (p=.003). Despite this, the outliers were

retained since the data represented scaled as opposed to continuous data and removing them did not change the direction of the conclusions. See figure 1.

Figure 1

Distribution of HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness Scores



Note. Data Values: Median = 5.00; First (lower) quartile=4.33; Third (upper) quartile =5.67. Interquartile range =1.34. Lower mild outliers = 1.67; second mild outlier = 2.66. Plot created with Jamovi v. 1.8.4.

All tests contained missing data. However, no test exceeded a maximum of 4.5% and therefore did not contravene Bennet's (2001) assumption that missing data >10% have an increased risk of bias.

Religious Affiliation

Independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare mean differences in Heartland Forgiveness Scales (HFS) and Locus of Evaluation Scales (LOE) scores between Catholic (*N*=121) and non-Catholic (*N*=118) Christians (See Table 6 for group comparison descriptive statistics and *t*-tests for all variables between Catholic and non-Catholic participants), testing Hypotheses 1 and 3.

There was no significant difference between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians in forgiveness overall, (t (229) =-1.11, p=.268; d = -0.15). Furthermore, there was no significance in the orientation of locus of evaluation (t (229) = 0.12, p =.905; d =0.02). Therefore, both hypotheses 1, that Catholics would have a greater tendency towards an external locus of evaluation and 2, that Catholics would demonstrate less propensity for self-forgiveness than non-Catholic Christians, were rejected.

To further explore mean differences in responses, the HFS subscales were analysed. Initially these appeared significant with differences between Catholics and non-Catholics in interpersonal forgiveness (t (233) = -2.38, p = .018,) with a small to moderate effect size (d = -0.31). However, when corrected for multiple comparisons using Bonferroni corrections (p=.05/3) the threshold of p=.017 surpassed and the results were deemed not significant (see Table 6 below).

Table 6:

Group comparison descriptive statistics and t-test results for all variables between Catholic and non-Catholic individuals.

	Catholic		Non-Catholic		T	P	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
HFS Total	4.65	0.77	4.76	0.75	-1.11	.268	-0.15
HFS Self-forgiveness	4.50	1.01	4.48	1.02	0.13	.896	0.02
HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	4.76	0.96	5.08	1.07	-2.38	.018	-0.31
HFS Situational Forgiveness	4.69	0.97	4.69	0.97	-0.01	.990	-0.00
LOE Total	3.59	0.75	3.57	0.80	0.12	.905	0.02
Low Self-Regard	3.66	0.94	3.67	1.06	-0.05	.960	-0.01
Concern For Others' Opinions	3.93	0.95	3.87	0.98	0.43	.665	0.06
Dependence	3.09	0.89	3.02	0.89	0.60	.551	0.08

Public Self Consciousness	3.51	0.80	3.54	0.81	-0.29	.772	-0.04

Note: HFS=Heartland Forgiveness Scale (higher scores indicate greater propensity for forgiveness typology); LOE=Locus of Evaluation Inventory (scores <3 indicate an internal locus of evaluation; scores >3 indicate an external locus of evaluation; scores of M= 3 indicate neutrality) M=mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

Reverse coded items on both HFS and LOE scales (see materials section for specific items) were transposed on Jamovi so that low scores were transformed into corresponding high scores on the scale and vice versa.

N=239

Religious Practice

Although religious practice was not part of the hypotheses of this study, it may influence the external or internal locus of evaluation presentation in individuals. Religious practice was measured by frequency of church attendance using 6 attendance levels (6= more than 4 times per week, 5 = 3 to 4 times per week, 4 = 1 to 2 times per week, 3 = 3 to 11 times per year, 2 = seldom, 1= never). Exploration of mean and standard deviation demonstrated Catholics to practice less frequently (*M*=3.35, *SD*=1.31) than non-Catholic Christians (*M*=3.92, *SD*=1.56).

Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to determine whether a significant relationship occurred between frequency of religious practice and forgiveness including subscales of self-forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness and situational forgiveness (measured by the Heartland Forgiveness Scale), and between frequency of religious practice and locus of evaluation orientation and subscales of low self-regard, concern for others' opinion, dependence on others and public self-conscience (measured by the Locus of Evaluation Scale) in Christians (both non-Catholic and Catholic).

Statistically significant moderate positive correlations were identified between frequency of religious practice and total forgiveness (r = .32, p <.001) along with subscales of interpersonal forgiveness (r = .26, p <.001) and situational forgiveness (r = .27, p <001).

Additionally, self-forgiveness was also statistically significant, however the positive correlation was weaker (r = .18, p = .006) (see Table 7).

No statistically significant correlations were identified between frequency of church practice and locus of evaluation amongst Christians (combined Catholic and Non-Catholic Christians) which suggests that increased church practice did not correlate with an external locus of orientation (See Table 7 for a correlation matrix for religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation in Catholic and non-Catholic Christians).

Table 7

Correlation matrix for religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation in Catholic and non-Catholic Christians.

	Practice	HFS Total	HFS Self-Forgiveness	HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	HFS Situational Forgiveness	LOE Total	Low Self-Regard	Concern for Others' Opinion	Dependence	Public Self-Consciousness
Practice	--									
HFS Total	0.32***	--								
HFS Self-Forgiveness	0.18**	0.75***	--							
HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	0.26***	0.70***	0.18**	--						
HFS Situational Forgiveness	0.27***	0.85***	0.56***	0.42***	--					
LOE Total	-0.12	-0.46***	-0.58***	0.09	-.042***	--				
Low Self Regard	-0.09	-0.45***	-0.65***	-0.01	-0.39***	0.87***	--			
Concern for Others' Opinions	-0.12	-0.30***	-0.38***	-0.02	-0.13***	0.85***	0.61***	--		
Dependence	-0.10	-0.35***	-0.38***	-0.12	-0.31***	0.79***	0.61***	0.54***	--	
Public Self-Consciousness	-0.06	-0.42***	-0.41***	-0.25***	-0.33***	0.68***	0.50***	0.43***	0.49***	--

Note. Practice describes the frequency of church attendance: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3= 3 to 11 times per year, 4 = 1 to 2 times per week, 5 = 3 to 4 times per week, 6 = more than 4 times per week. Reverse coded items on both HFS and LOE scales (see materials section for specific items) were transposed on Jamovi so that low scores were transformed into corresponding high scores on the scale and vice versa.

Higher HFO score indicate a higher propensity for forgiveness. Higher LOE scores indicate a more proclivity towards an external locus of evaluation.

HFS=Heartland Forgiveness Scale.
LOE=Locus of Evaluation Inventory.
N=239
*** Correlation is significant at $p < .001$, ** Correlation is significant at $p < .01$, * Correlation is significant at $p < .05$

However independent analysis of the two denominations, Catholic and Christian non-Catholic were explored to see whether a significant relationship occurred between each denomination and religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation.

There was a significant positive moderate correlation between frequency of religious practice and total forgiveness (r=.43, p<.001) along with subscales of interpersonal forgiveness (r=.36, p<.001) and situational forgiveness (r=.38, p<.001). There was also a positive small to moderate correlation between religious practice and self-forgiveness (r=.22, p=.018). However, unlike the combined correlation of both Catholic and Christian non-Catholics, there was a significant small to moderate negative correlation between religious practice and locus of evaluation (a lower locus of evaluation denotes internal orientation as opposed to external) in this non-Catholic Christians (r= -.20, p=.032) (see Table 8 for a correlation matrix for religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation in non-Catholic Christian participants).

Table 8

Correlation matrix for religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation in non-Catholic Christian participants.

	Practice	HFS Total	HFS Self-Forgiveness	HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	HFS Situational Forgiveness	LOE Total	Low Self-Regard	Concern for Others' Opinion	Dependence	Public Self-Consciousness
Practice	--									
HFS Total	0.43***	--								
HFS Self-Forgiveness	0.22*	0.73**	--							
HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	0.36***	0.63***	0.05	--						
HFS Situational Forgiveness	0.38**	0.85***	0.58***	0.13***	--					
LOE Total	-0.20*	-0.46***	-0.62***	0.03	-0.43***	--				
Low Self Regard	-0.17	-0.47***	-0.72***	0.08	-0.38***	0.87***	--			
Concern for Others' Opinions	-0.18	-0.25**	-0.38***	0.12	-0.30**	0.86***	0.60***	--		
Dependence	-0.12	-0.36***	-0.38***	-0.08	-0.33***	0.80***	0.59***	0.59***	--	
Public Self-Consciousness	-0.14	-0.43***	-0.42***	-0.16	0.69***	0.69***	0.50***	0.45***	0.50***	--

Note. Practice describes the frequency of church attendance: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3= 3 to 11 times per year, 4 = 1 to 2 times per week, 5 = 3 to 4 times per week, 6 = more than 4 times per week. Reverse coded items on both HFS and LOE scales (see materials section for specific items) were transposed on Jamovi so that low scores were transformed into corresponding high scores on the scale and vice versa.

Higher HFO score indicate a higher propensity for forgiveness. Higher LOE scores indicate a more proclivity towards an external locus of evaluation.

HFS=Heartland Forgiveness Scale.
LOE=Locus of Evaluation Inventory.
*** Correlation is significant at $p < .001$
** Correlation is significant at $p < .01$
* Correlation is significant at $p < .05$

In contrast, there were no significant correlations between religious practice and forgiveness, including its subscales, not between religious practice and locus of evaluation in Catholic participants (see Table 9 for a correlation matrix for religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation in Catholic participants).

Table 9

Correlation matrix for religious practice, forgiveness, and locus of evaluation in Catholic participants.

	Practice	HFS Total	HFS Self-Forgiveness	HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	HFS Situational Forgiveness	LOE Total	Low Self-Regard	Concern for Others	Dependence	Public Self-Consciousness
Practice	--									
HFS Total	0.17	--								
HFS Self-Forgiveness	0.15	0.78***	--							
HFS Interpersonal Forgiveness	0.09	0.77***	0.33***	--						
HFS Situational Forgiveness	0.15	0.86***	0.55***	0.55***	--					
LOE Total	-0.03	-0.47***	-0.54***	-0.21*	-0.41***	--				
Low Self Regard	-0.01	-0.43***	-0.57***	-0.11	-0.41***	0.88***	--			
Concern for Others' Opinions	-0.04	-0.34***	-0.39***	-0.17	-0.32***	0.84***	0.63***	--		
Dependence	-0.06	-0.33***	-0.39***	-0.15	-0.30***	0.79***	0.64***	0.49***	--	
Public Self-Consciousness	-0.01	-0.41***	-0.39***	-0.35***	-0.27**	0.67***	0.50***	0.40***	0.49***	--

Note. Practice describes the frequency of church attendance: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3= 3 to 11 times per year, 4 = 1 to 2 times per week, 5 = 3 to 4 times per week, 6 = more than 4 times per week. N=239. Reverse coded items on both HFS and LOE scales (see materials section for specific items) were transposed on Jamovi so that low scores were transformed into corresponding high scores on the scale and vice versa.

Higher HFO score indicate a higher propensity for forgiveness. Higher LOE scores indicate a more proclivity towards an external locus of evaluation.

HFS=Heartland Forgiveness Scale.
LOE=Locus of Evaluation Inventory.
*** Correlation is significant at $p < .001$
** Correlation is significant at $p < .01$
* Correlation is significant at $p < .05$

Experiences of Self Forgiveness

87 out of 119 Catholic participants reported individual experiences of self-forgiveness (74.8%), in comparison to 92 out of 117 non-Catholic Christians (78.6%) indicating Catholic participants reported such experiences slightly less than non-Catholic Christians.

No association was found between self-forgiveness and Christian denomination using a Pearson's chi square test of association. ($X^2(1)>=.982$, $p=.322$) (See Table 10 below).

Table 10:

Association between experiences of self-forgiveness and Christian denomination.

Self-Forgiveness Experiences	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Total
Yes	87	92	179
No	32	25	57
Total	119	117	236

Note. Chi square contingency table exploring association between experiences of self-forgiveness and Christian denomination. *N*=236
a. No cells had an expected count of less than 5
b. Computed for a 2x2 table.

There were statistically significant differences between those who reported experiencing self-forgiveness and those who hadn't for total forgiveness (t (229) = 4.66, p <.001; d = 0.72), and locus of evaluation score (t (229) -3.28, p=.001; d = -0.51), with large effect sizes in each. Additionally, there were significant strong positive correlations in the subscales of self-forgiveness (t (229) =4.98, p<.001, d=.76) and situational forgiveness (t (229) =3.42, p<.001, d=.52) and a strong negative correlation for the locus of evaluation self-regard subscale (t (234) = =4.23, p<.001, d= -.65) (see Table 11 for descriptive statistics for self-reported experiences of self-forgiveness in Catholic and non-Catholic individuals).

Although on first sight the Heartland Forgiveness subscale of: interpersonal forgiveness (p=.023), and the Locus of Evaluation subscales of: dependence (p=.018), and public self-consciousness (p=.017) appeared significant, once corrected for multiple comparisons (threshold for forgiveness subscales p=.05/3 = .017, threshold for locus of evaluation subscales p=.05/4 =.012) all exceeded the threshold and were deemed not significant.

Table 11:

Group comparison descriptive statistics for forgiveness in Catholic and non-Catholic Christian Individuals.

SF Experience:	Yes		No		T	P	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
HFS Total	4.83	0.69	4.31	0.84	4.66	**<.001**	0.72
HFS Self-forgiveness	4.67	0.95	3.94	1.03	4.98	**<.001**	0.76
HFS Interpersonal forgiveness	5.01	1.00	4.65	1.07	2.29	.023	0.35
HFS Situational forgiveness	4.80	0.88	4.32	1.01	3.42	**<.001**	0.52
LOE Total	3.49	0.74	3.88	0.83	-3.28	**.001**	-0.51
Low Self-Regard	3.52	0.96	4.14	0.98	-4.23	**<.001**	-0.65
Concern For Others' Opinions	3.84	0.95	4.09	1.00	-1.69	.093	-0.36
Dependence	2.98	0.88	3.30	0.89	-2.38	.018	-0.36
Public Self Consciousness	3.45	0.73	3.74	0.97	-2.40	.017	-0.37

Note. Group comparison descriptive statistics and t-test results for all variables self-reported experiences of self-forgiveness in Catholic and non-Catholic Christian Individuals.
Reverse coded items on both HFS and LOE scales (see materials section for specific items) were transposed on Jamovi so that low scores were transformed into corresponding high scores on the scale and vice versa.

SF Experience = Self-Reported response Yes/No; HFS=Heartland Forgiveness Scale (higher scores indicate greater propensity for forgiveness typology); LOE=Locus of Evaluation Inventory (scores <3 indicate an internal locus of evaluation; scores >3 indicate an external locus of evaluation; scores of M= 3 indicate neutrality) M=mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

Further independent *t*-tests were conducted to explore Catholics and non-Catholic Christian experiences of self-forgiveness independently of each other. The findings of these *t*-tests provided very little divergence between the combined scores reported.

Forgiveness Importance by Type

To further test hypothesis 3, that Catholics would see self-forgiveness as relatively less important compared to other Christians, frequency statistics were run on responses to a survey question asking participants to allocate 100 points between forgiveness types of divine forgiveness, forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness, according to personal importance. 27 of 233 participants' data were excluded from the final analysis as their responses indicated task incomprehension since point allocation either exceeded 100% across the three responses or data were missing. The excluded data accounted for 11.6% of the responses for this item which was just above Bennet's (2001) critical point (>10%) for data bias thus it may be important to exercise caution in analysing these results since they may be susceptible to bias. Missing data was representative of Catholics (6.9%) and non-Catholics (4.7%) respectively.

Both Catholic and non-Catholic individuals prioritised divine forgiveness as of primary importance compared with self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others, as indicated by greater allocation to this factor compared to the other two. However, allocation of points differed between the two groups significantly (Catholic M =34.95, non-Catholic M = 50.65) with non-Catholics allocating 50.65% importance compared to 34.95% in Catholics, indicating that non-Catholics prioritise divine forgiveness more favourably. A Pearson's chi square rest of association (with mean scores rounded to have integers) suggested that there was no association between religious denomination and importance of forgiveness type ($X^2(2)=4.361$, $p=.113$). See Table 12 for chi square contingency table exploring the association between Christian denomination and mean forgiveness type importance.

Table 12:

Association between Christian denomination and mean forgiveness type importance.

Forgiveness type by importance	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Total
Self-Forgiveness	32	25	57
Interpersonal Forgiveness	32	25	57
Divine Forgiveness	35	50	85
Total	99	100	200

Note. Chi square contingency table exploring association between Christian denomination and mean forgiveness type importance. *N*=239
a. No cells had an expected count of less than 5
b. Computed for a 2x3 table.

Catholic individuals allocated similarity of point distribution across all three forgiveness types with only a few points difference between values (Divine=35%, Other =32%, Self=32%). Furthermore, Catholic individuals valued self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others more highly than non-Catholic individuals which appear in contradiction with the hypotheses of this study which predicted that Catholics would rate Self-Forgiveness to be of least importance in the forgiveness tripartite compared with non-Catholic Christians.

Discussion: Study 2

This study found no significant difference between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians in the orientation of their locus of evaluation, nor were there any significant differences between these groups in their propensity for self-forgiveness. Thus, the first two hypotheses. 1. Catholics will demonstrate a greater tendency towards an external locus of evaluation than non-Catholic Christians, 2. Catholics will demonstrate less self-forgiveness than non-Catholic Christians) were rejected. The third hypothesis predicted that Catholics

would report self-forgiveness to be of least importance in the forgiveness tripartite (divine, self, and forgiveness of others) compared to non-Catholic Christians. Although Catholics did indeed report self-forgiveness to be of least importance in the tripartite presented, they nonetheless rated it as more important than non-Catholic Christians did and so, the final hypothesis was also rejected.

The findings of Study 2 contradicted those of the Study 1 in which Catholic guilt and self-unforgiveness were prominent themes. Catholics in the first study expressed the belief that self-forgiveness was neither possible nor desirable and yet, Catholic participants psychometric responses in the second study demonstrated a propensity for self-forgiveness, moreover, they explicitly reported subjective experiences of the phenomenon. These contrasting findings may be consequential of the dissimilarity of sample size across the two studies with the first study using only twenty participants and the second using one hundred and twenty Catholics participants. Furthermore, participant motivation to participate may have been different between studies. Where the first study recruited participants using poster campaigns within churches, the second used an online study recruitment platform. Where research shows that Catholics are keen to convey their piety and their Catholic guilt (McKay, Herold & Whitehouse, 2013), it may provide insight into the motivation of those participating in qualitative research as opposed to those who completed psychometric tests. Finally, recalling and expressing guilt as required within the first study is arguably quite different from responding to hypothetical statements as required of the participants in the second study. This will be a key area to address in future research.

An unexpected finding of this study was that religious practice (measured by frequency of church attendance) correlated significantly with overall forgiveness, interpersonal forgiveness, situational forgiveness, and self-forgiveness in non-Catholic Christians, and religious practice correlated negatively with the overall locus of evaluation (a

lower locus of evaluation suggests an internal rather than external orientation). However, there were no significant correlations between religious practice and forgiveness nor locus of evaluation in Catholics. Although religious practice was not a focal point of this research, following Study 1 where participants disclosed inauthentic practices of their faith concerning their approach to sacramental reconciliation, prayer recital, and church attendance, data were gathered to explore how religious practice might contribute to self-forgiving behaviour. Furthermore, it might be an expectation that greater church attendance might influence the locus of evaluation presentation, depending on whether followers internalise their practice or externalise it.

Dezutter et al (2006) assert that frequency of mass attendance does not influence the experience of wellbeing and anxiety in followers regardless of their Christian denomination which many contradict the findings of this study for non-Catholic Christians whose capacity for forgiveness correlated positively with church frequency. The fact that these findings were not observed in Catholic participants too provides further support for inauthenticity of Catholic practices since forgiveness is strongly reinforced within the Catholic mass. This is an area that will benefit from further research.

General Discussion

The research findings of the first study were consistent with prior expectations, Catholic individuals did express an inhibited propensity for self-forgiveness and many questioned whether it was possible to self-forgive at all. When asked to draw upon self-forgiveness doctrines to support the phenomenon no participants were able to do so, nor were they able to draw upon other doctrines such as the central message of the Bible (that Jesus died to atone for our sins and as such, we are already forgiven) to provide a rationale for the practice of the phenomenon. Furthermore, participants spoke about feeling guilt and shame both in the wake of a transgression and in their inability to achieve the moral standards of behaviour expected of them as Catholics. This, along with the tendency to ruminate on their misdemeanours and retain negative emotions long after a transgression provided support for the Catholic guilt phenomenon as an inhibitor of self-forgiveness. The findings of this first study were then used to inform the second.

The findings of the second study were inconsistent with the hypotheses. It was predicted that Catholics would demonstrate a greater tendency towards an external locus of evaluation and a lower propensity for self-forgiveness than non-Catholic Christians. However, the research found no difference between these samples in either locus of evaluation or forgiveness and self-forgiveness responses. Yet, both studies yielded unexpected results too. In the first study, although Catholic individuals disclosed guilt and shame in the recognition of their transgressions along with a pious expression of their faith, the practice of some aspects of their faith was inauthentic. Participants disclosed the disinclination, yet obligation, to attend mass along with the recital of prayers by rote without internalisation within mass services, but perhaps most prominently, participants disclosed that they approached sacramental reconciliation insincerely by rehearsing their sin disclosures and minimising both the sin-severity and quantity.

A similar unexpected result was found in the second study whereby religious practice correlated positively with forgiveness (others, situational, self) and negatively with locus of evaluation in non-Catholic Christians. Conversely, there was no correlation between these two phenomena and religious practice in Catholics. Thus, it appears that certain practices of faith for Catholics may not be authentic despite their participation suggesting that they may serve a different purpose to the aims of their practice.

Inauthenticity of practice

The research aimed to understand the emotive experiences of Catholics in response to transgression and forgiveness and the ritualised practice of their faith. An expectation of this was that the conciliatory and penitential mass practices of Catholics would contribute to the Catholic guilt phenomena in their tendency to emphasise the transgressional failings and the requirement for contrition.

Canon Law in conjunction with Catholic doctrine asserts that reconciliation is only efficacious when penitents present their sins in the congruent examination of their conscience, particularly sins that contravene the Decalogue (The Ten Commandments). The declaration: *"for these sins and all of those that I do not remember, I am truly sorry"* emphasises the requirement for the integrity of disclosure in the totality of one's transgressions in the promise of redemption. Thus, it would be reasonable to assume that these practices would be less effective in reducing Catholic guilt and improving the proclivity for self-forgiveness than for those who approach the sacrament sincerely since research shows that forgiveness requires sincerity for it to be authentic (Schumann & Dweck, 2014). Conversely, the practice of frequent communion has also been observed to diminish the culture of Catholic guilt (D'Antonio, Dillon, & Gautier, 2011), and the frequency of prayer increased feelings of control (Vasiliauskas & McMinn, 2013). Thus, the function of prayer

and reconciliation may be linked to coping behaviours as opposed to redemption and self-forgiveness.

Furthermore, Catholic Mass services which utilise the penitential act to request forgiveness from God and other followers may be ineffective in their aims. The analysis of participant experiences in Study 1 suggests that Catholic individuals appear to conform to the expected rituals despite not gaining relief. This is supported by other research that shows that public forms of forgiveness and reconciliation may be unproductive (Browning & Reed, 2004) despite evidence that confession of transgressions can be a predictor of reduced wrongdoings (Stice, 1992). Yet, when performed authentically the act of reconciling with God has been shown to have the potential to be highly effective in reducing the dissonance and the discomfort that arises when one conflicts with their moral standards of behaviour (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019).

Sacraments such as reconciliation and prayer recital can be rituals that reinforce religious doctrines yet, research shows that rituals are devoid of emotion and are performed to negotiate a more favourable social position (Wilson, 2002) which may provide a rationale for Catholic participation. If authentic reconciliation and prayer involves the sincere acceptance and acknowledgement of one's wrongdoing in conjunction with a genuine sense of regret and remorse (Schumann, 2012) the ritualisation of this process may negate its purpose.

Therefore, it may be that it is Catholic reconciliatory practices themselves that contribute to the inauthenticity observed. Taylor (2007) asserts that the prerequisite to declare one's sins to the priest in *persona-Christi* inhibits the sincerity with which one approaches the sacrament with individuals questioning the empathy of a person who may be unlikely to have relatable personal experiences. Indeed, participants in the first study reported feeling

embarrassed by the humanity of the priest and some questioned the requirement for an intermediary between themselves and God. This is corroborated by the research of D'Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier (2011) who found that traditional perceptions of Catholic priests as a barometer of morality have diminished in recent years which could impede the capacity for individuals to experience priests in *persona-Christi* if indeed an intermediary is necessary at all.

Additionally, a few participants spoke about non-attendance of Church services as "cheating God" and yet this did not improve attendances amongst Catholics, nor did it translate to their motivation to attend confession. In fact, non-Catholic Christians demonstrated greater religious practice commitment in their church attendance than Catholic individuals. Other paradoxes were identified whereby participants spoke of impossible Catholic standards that caused anxiety and distress but then described Catholic Church membership as an invaluable place of belonging, suggesting that there is a cost to this belonging.

Indeed, individuals who ascribe to religious doctrines with forgiveness as a central theme may feel most aligned with their faith when they perceive themselves to be behaving in accordance with forgiveness expectations (Lawler-Row, 2010). Moreover, when individuals practice self-forgiveness, they have an increased propensity to forgive others (regardless of religious denomination). Yet, despite the requirement for Catholics to practice forgiveness within the structure of their mass each week the frequency of mass attendance did not correlate with an increased propensity for forgiveness suggesting that the conciliatory and transgression absolving function of this part of the mass does not necessarily serve its purpose for Catholics.

Conversely, although sacramental reconciliation and prayer recital appears to be approached insincerely by the Catholic participants interviewed, it does not necessarily mean that they are not aware of the extent of their transgression. Indeed, Ahteensuu (2019) suggests that individuals may be very aware of their immorality but argue that there is a significant difference between the implicit acknowledgement of their transgression and disclosing it openly to others. Yet, presenting as remorseful to others, as all participants did in the first study, has been found to be received more favourably suggesting appeasement rather than sincerity. In this way, church attendance and sacramental participation may create a form of moral licencing (Mazar & Zhong, 2010) whereby Catholics consider the act of attending reconciliation as a good deed that redresses both their previous misdemeanours and those thereafter.

Self-unforgiveness

It was an expectation of the study that Catholic and non-Catholic Christians would consider interpersonal forgiveness to be important. This is supported by Macaskill (2007) who found that Christian individuals consider forgiveness of those who have wronged them to be central to their faith. Perhaps, more importantly, it is a foundational doctrine of Christianity that is promoted within the Biblical doctrines read during religious services and recited in practices urging Christians to extend Christ-like forgiveness to others. Indeed, it is further reinforced in The Lord's Prayer with the line *"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*" However, it appears that this is not extended to include self-forgiveness, nor are there any doctrines to support the practice of this phenomenon.

The present research demonstrated that church attendance increased the propensity for all types of forgiveness in non-Catholic Christian denominations, which is supported by the research of Paloma and Gallup (1991) who found up to 50% difference in forgiving

behaviours between those who did attend and those who did not attend church. Yet this effect was not observed in the Catholic sample. Furthermore, church attendance was higher in the participants in the first study compared to those in the second. Nonetheless, research shows that the propensity for all forgiveness types is influenced by one's ascription to the doctrines that support the phenomenon (Worthington & Sandage, 2001). Yet although both the Catholic and non-Catholic Christians in the second study ascribe to Biblical doctrines, non-Catholic Christians correlated positively with forgiveness (others, self, situational) compared with Catholics, suggesting that there are more operational and didactic factors that may contribute to the phenomenon than scripture alone. Indeed, prior research highlighted that Protestants feel assured of God's forgiveness whereas Catholics feel the need to earn it (Quessnell, 1990).

When individuals belong to more than one identity group including nationality, social group, ethnicity, and faith system, they may find themselves in conflict and must assess their strength of commitment to each group to guide their response. One may want to forgive or reconcile but feel bound by societal expectations including the law whose function is to express the judgement of the community (Feinberg, 1974). Indeed, participants in the first study spoke about how honouring the Ten Commandments conflicted with societal norms and inhibited self-forgiveness and self-acceptance leading to feelings of frustration at the inevitability of their failure.

Yet, where there is a desire to forgive, individuals can be given the resources to achieve it (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014) with psychological interventions possible that reduce the emotional stress and anxiety experienced by the victim (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Indeed, Catholic participants in the second study did report experiences of self-forgiveness despite the lack of doctrines to support the phenomenon.

Conversely, self-forgiveness was a conflicting phenomenon across both studies. Research has intended to examine how the lack of Christian and, more specifically, Catholic doctrines may serve to inhibit self-forgiveness. Although the first study confirmed the absence of the phenomenon in Catholic experiences, participants questioned its relevance. Some felt that forgiveness could only be bestowed relationally by God or by the victim of one's transgression. Furthermore, one participant considered self-forgiveness to be a way of reducing culpability in the absence of another person's judgement or absolution.

Taking a reflexive approach in examining why I thought that self-forgiveness may hold importance in Christianity, a Catholic priest, and a Baptist minister, were interviewed to garner insight. Their suggestion was that forgiveness is essentially relational in nature as supported by Anderson (2007), furthermore, this relational stance may be considered vertical (divine) or horizontal (interpersonal) in essence. Indeed, some may even consider self-forgiveness to be theologically incorrect for this reason (Vitz & Meade, 2010). Yet, self-unforgiveness has been found to negatively impact individual physiological and psychological wellbeing (Seawell, Toussaint, & Cheadle, 2013) leading one to question whether in the absence of self-forgiveness, Catholics are more susceptible to these emotional and physical complaints or whether Catholic guilt exists partially because of the inability to gain relief through self-forgiveness.

Catholic guilt

A primary aim of the present research was to explore how Catholic guilt may inhibit self-forgiveness in Catholic individuals. A prior literature review observed a strong relationship between guilt and religiosity with religious individuals reporting higher levels of guilt than other secular populations (Murray, Ciarrocchi, & Murray-Swank, 2007). These

findings were consistent with the findings of the first study where Catholic participants reported feelings of unworthiness, guilt, and religious fallibility following a transgression.

However, research shows there are no differences between Catholics and non-Catholic followers in guilt-proneness (Vaisy & Smith, 2008) which was supported by the quantitative findings of the second study. In fact, research undertaken by Woodhead (2013) found that Catholic individuals when compared to other systems of faith felt little to no shame in contravening the Church's strict Canon Law which condemns sexual practices outside of marriage, the use of contraception and pornography, for example. Yet, where these acts may contravene one's faith, their private nature may render them less threatening to group belonging than other public behaviours that may have more overt social implications. Indeed, Pinhey and Perez (2000) found that divorced Catholics felt an inordinate sense of guilt in their transgressional self-assessment compared with non-Catholic individuals. These findings support the qualitative data in the present study whereby one interviewee spoke of feeling ashamed of her divorce and expressed fear of being outed to other parishioners in her non-receipt of the Eucharist leading to her dishonest presentation for communion to disguise her marital status.

The first study observed characteristics of Catholic guilt in all participants, and all conveyed the belief that self-forgiveness was impossible. Yet, how individuals internalise their faith, and indeed, their guilt may be an important consideration since self-conscious emotions such as guilt and shame have been found to have weaker evidence of universality across cultures (Eid & Deiner, 2001) and the nature of 'self' may vary in terms of differences of experiences, culture and religious motivation (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002) which may provide some understanding as to why such different results were presented between the first and second study.

Research shows that religious individuals are often perceived more favourably than non-religious individuals in a diverse range of social dimensions (Bailey & Doriot, 1985). This "halo effect" may suggest a motivation for Catholics to be perceived in this way and it could be argued that the pious portrayal of collective Catholics perpetuates the phenomenon of Catholic Guilt. Indeed, in a similar way to the findings of (Lyndsay-Hartz, 1984) Catholic participants in the first study appeared eager to communicate their guilt. Furthermore, they demonstrated self-deprecating and redemptive reconciliatory responses when asked about their experiences of transgression and forgiveness, inferring that self-forgiveness was an impossible task, and absolution of sin was only possible relationally through an omnipotent God, or interpersonally by a person they had wronged. Yet this response was not observed in the psychometric tests of Study 2. Indeed, it appears that it is Catholics themselves who report this unique form of guilt as opposed to externalised observation or recognition from others. Swan, Heesacker, Snipes, and Perrin (2013) assert that a halo effect is more prominent in religiously self-identified individuals which suggests that although Catholic guilt involves the experiencing of negative self-conscious emotions which may be felt implicitly, there are aspects of this phenomenon that are may be presented externally too. Conversely, despite support for Catholic guilt in the first study, there was no difference in self-forgiveness between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians in self-forgiveness practices and experiences of the phenomenon.

Locus of evaluation

It was hypothesised that Catholics in Study 2 would have a more externalised locus of evaluation than the non-Catholic Christian participants. This hypothesis was formed due to the requirement for Catholics to follow relational models of forgiveness and to practice collective, public reconciliation and prayer which might lead to an expectation that Catholics derive their sense of value and meaning externally to themselves. Indeed, Burcur (2007)

defines an external locus of evaluation to be characterised by a low self-regard and a negative self-appraisal with a willingness to accept and internalise feedback gleaned from others as opposed to relying upon one's moral compass. This may have similar characteristics to Catholic guilt in the negative self-evaluation. Despite this, no significant differences between Catholic and non-Catholic participants' locus of evaluation were observed.

These findings may be understood by the research of Woodgate (2013) who assert that Catholics do not conform to ecumenical authority and instead derive guidance for living and decision making, irrespective of church attendance or religious observance, from both their intrinsic moral compass or from family and friends. However, this ought to conversely result in an internal locus of evaluation.

The second study found that religious practice correlated negatively with locus of evaluation in non-Catholic Christians suggesting that church attendance may be an internalised experience for these individuals, however, the same was not true for Catholics whose locus of evaluation was not impacted by the frequency of their practice. Thus, it will be valuable to explore these findings further in future research.

In sum, if we are to consider that self-forgiveness may be theologically incorrect and that forgiveness is instead replaced by acceptance of divine forgiveness, this ought to render the penitent dependent upon forgiveness and absolution from God and thus, predispose one to an external locus of evaluation yet this was not found. It could be argued that the relationship that Catholics have with their God is internalised since God cannot be seen, thus deservingness of forgiveness may be influenced by one's subjective sense of self-vale and one's sense of having been forgiven by God. Therefore, in the pursuit of self-forgiveness individuals may be reliant upon their internalisation of the process which may be influenced

not only by their self-value, worthiness, and experience of guilt but also by the sincerity with which they acknowledge and approach reconciliation.

Limitations and Implications

Forgiveness research has been dominated by quantitative study designs with statement-based Likert scales which may be argued to be reductive in their approach. Their assumptions of a homogenous prescribed phenomenon may not fit all perceptions and thus, researchers cannot be certain of their findings. Equally, although qualitative forgiveness research is scarce, the use of this method has its limitations.

Despite the rigorous process of thematic analysis, there is a tendency for this type of research to be susceptive to bias. Due to the subjective nature of the qualitative research, I provided a reflexive statement that identified my subjective beliefs and understandings of faith because this might have potentially biased the analytic process (Finley & Gough, 2003). I addressed this by interviewing both a Catholic priest and a Baptist minister to gain opposing objective perspectives however, the increased potential for subjective bias could also have been mitigated by having data double-coded (Landis & Koch, 1977) or by employing a triangulation system in which other researchers may be invited to participate in the identification of prominent themes.

The employment of the mixed methods approach utilised in this study assigned equal value to each methodology with the qualitative research used constructively to identify prominent themes and the quantitative methods used to establish the relationship and effect. This mixed approach mitigated some of the limitations of each approach however, the findings between each study were largely inconsistent suggesting that the samples for each study were not equally representative of the Catholic population.

Indeed, there were many limitations of the study sample. Firstly, there existed an over-representation of women in the research sample (female 64.5%, male 35.5%) due to a recruitment anomaly with the Prolific platform. This may have influenced the research data since research shows that women exhibit a higher propensity for religiosity in comparison to men across diverse aspects of religious life (Toussaint & Webb, 2010), moreover, women have been found to have a greater proclivity for forgiveness (Toussaint & Williams, 2008). However, despite research asserting the women are more prone to shame (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison, & Morton, 2012), this does not necessarily translate to non-self-forgiveness (Charzynska, 2015; Hall, et al., 2018). Thus, research is not conclusive as to whether women are more prone to self-forgiveness than men and so it is difficult to understand how the higher recruitment of woman may have impacted the results. Nonetheless, it would be valuable to repeat the study with a greater sample of men to see whether similar results are found.

Secondly, the study utilised participants from the United Kingdom only, yet research shows that religiosity is influenced by culture, demographic, and nationality too (Foster & Foster, 2019). Indeed, every study is completed within a culture. Catholic followers in the UK are in an unusual position whereby they practice their faith within a nation in which Protestantism is the dominant faith. In this way, we cannot be sure to what extent Anglo-Catholics may have absorbed Protestant culture. It is likely that the results of this study would differ in countries where Catholicism is the dominant faith (such as Poland, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and thus, this would be an interesting direction for future research.

The disparity observed between the results of Study 1 and Study 2 is likely to be consequential of the difference in sample size between the studies (Study 1, N=20, Study 2, N=239). The participants of Study 1 were not representative of the Catholic population compared to the sample used in Study 2, moreover, the recruitment process for each was different. Where participants recruited in the first study responded to poster advertisements

within churches, participants in the second study were recruited using an online platform and psychometric tests. Furthermore, taking part in an interview in which one is encouraged to express and explore their subjective responses to sin and transgression is likely to foster a different motivation from that of the completion of psychometric questionnaires.

A challenge of this study like other studies that utilise psychometric measures of self-forgiveness including trait (Thompson, et al., 2005) and state self-forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013), is that they depict distinct qualities of self-forgiveness, resulting in conflicting associations between the phenomenon and its correlates. For example, in their study of interpersonal transgression, Griffin, Worthington, Lavelock, Greer, Lin, Davis and Hook (2015) found that State Self-Forgiveness scale (Wohl, et al., 2008) correlated negatively with guilt, yet the Genuine Self-Forgiveness scale (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013) correlated positively with guilt suggesting that trait and state forgiveness may have different effects. Using this to understand the disparity in the present research between the first and second study, it is possible too that each study captured different effects in the sample.

The disparity between Study 1 and Study 2 could have been mitigated in part by employing more rigour in the design of study 2. For example, the second study used the self-forgiveness subscale of the Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson, 2005), however, the Differentiated Process Scale of Self-Forgiveness (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013) might have been a better measure since it captures genuine self-forgiveness, self-punishment, and pseudo self-forgiveness, following an interpersonal transgression. These concepts may be more closely related to the themes generated from the thematic analysis of the first study (Catholic guilt, atonement and reckoning, inauthentic practice, religious motivation orientation, self-unforgiveness) and would have offered the potential for greater coherence between each study since it would increase the likelihood of capturing similar effects. However, because self-forgiveness was the phenomenon of interest for this research, it was decided that

exploring guilt as an inhibitor of self-forgiveness would move too far away from the research question. This is perhaps another area where a reflexive approach was needed but impeded by my own subjectivity. Following data collection and analysis of study 1, I took time to consider what the themes captured were communicating about Catholic experiences of forgiveness and then used this understanding to inform the additional questions that I posed to the participants in study 2 which pertained to whether they had experienced self-forgiveness and how importantly they rated this phenomenon. However, I did not put the same parameters in place to measure other prominent themes that emerged from this same corpus including, guilt and inauthenticity of Catholic practice. This resulted in a lack of continuity between the studies and although both have yielded interesting results which provide opportunity for further research, the overall study design has missed an opportunity for clarity.

Therefore, future research would be valuable in comparing Catholic and Protestant experiences of self-forgiveness using the Differentiated Self Forgiveness scale (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013) in conjunction with a measurement scale of guilt since Study 2 did not measure guilt (despite it being a dominant theme from Study 1). This might provide some direction in understanding the role of Catholic guilt in Catholic practice and the propensity for self-forgiveness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found no difference in the proclivity for self-forgiveness between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians despite qualitative evidence to support the Catholic guilt phenomenon. Furthermore, there were no differences in the presentation of locus of evaluation between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians suggesting that their value

is not necessarily gleaned externally regardless of the collective nature of Catholic practices. However, the frequency of religious practice did correlate positively with all types of forgiveness in non-Catholic Christians but not in Catholics suggesting that mass attendance does not improve the proclivity for self-forgiveness in Catholics.

Despite self-report themes of self-criticism, unworthiness, and shame in response to human imperfection Catholics may perpetuate this state of sin in inauthentic religious practice. The ritualistic performing of Catholic rituals including reciting penitential prayers by rote and selective reconciliation disclosure may render Catholic penance and absolution insincere and inauthentic. Yet, regardless of inauthenticity, prior research has found that Catholics consider the practice of reconciliation to be beneficial (D'Antonio, et al, 2011). This may be because it produces a 'good enough Catholic' effect by which compliant Catholics participate in reconciliation as a means to an end; to receive the Eucharist, or perhaps because it provides a sense of control derived from extrinsic religious motivation and in-group belonging (Cohen & Hill, 2007).

Whilst it appears that Catholic guilt does indeed appear to have an authentic emotional effect on the experiences of anxiety, fear, and frustration in Catholic followers, the ritualised practices that surround Catholicism such as reconciliation and collective prayer recital are undertaken less sincerely, with evidence to support a lack of internalisation or emotional affect during or following participation, implying that these rituals do not necessarily support the phenomenon that they are used for.

These findings suggest that there may be a value in exploring the functions and motivations of certain Catholic rituals and their efficacy, since the combination of an obligation to participate and the guilt-based insincerity in one's approach may conversely perpetuate Catholic guilt rather than remedy it.

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Appendix A: Participant Information

A study of faith and forgiveness

Introduction

I would like to warmly invite you to participate in a research study. So as to enable you to make an informed choice as to whether to proceed it is important to ensure that you understand why the research is being undertaken and what impact it may have on you. Take time to read the information below thoroughly, if you would like to discuss your decision with another person you are welcome to do so. Please feel free to ask me if anything feels unclear or if you would like further information.

Why am I doing the project?

The research is being completed to fulfil the research requirements of my MSc in Social Psychology at the University of Kent. The study aims to investigate individuals' subjective experience of forgiveness; particularly self-forgiveness, and the impact of personality on this.

What will you have to do if you agree to take part?

Taking part will involve the completion of online psychometric tests; these can be done on a computer in a place of your choice. The questions will vary and cover a range of subjects including faith, forgiveness and personality across two psychometric questionnaires utilising multiple choice scales to measure your responses, and an additional four tick-box questions. There will be no researcher present during the tests, however, I will be contactable via telephone/email/messenger if you experience any problems during the study.

How much of your time will participation involve?

Overall, it will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Will my participation in the study be confidential?

All the information collected about you during the course of this research will be stored confidentially in accordance with GDPR (2018) laws.

All participant information is anonymous and encoded; researchers cannot distinguish between individual participant answers.

The research will be completed by September 2021. You will be contacted by this date and offered a copy of the results of the study which will be sent via email. This Study will be submitted to The University of Kent for assessment for MSc Research, Social Psychology.

What are the advantages of taking part?

You will be compensated £2 for your time in completing this study, via the prolific platform.

You may find in subject matter interesting and enjoy having the opportunity to voice your opinion. Your participation will provide a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the area of self-forgiveness.

Are there any disadvantages of taking part?

It is possible that you may find some questions intrusive, or that the study focus area of forgiveness may evoke distress, thus, it is important that you are aware that you can refuse to answer/terminate your participation. This will result in your withdrawal from the study. There are no penalties to this, and participants will not be challenged or required to justify their decision to withdraw.

At the end of this study you will be invited to share your experience of participating in this research and we will use this information to inform and improve future study practice.

Do you have to take part in this study?

You are not obliged to participate in the study, you may ask for further information (where possible) to aid in your decision-making. If you require independent advice with regard to your role as a research participant, you may contact Prof. Roger Giner Sorolla at University of Kent for an independent appraisal. His contact details are provided at the bottom of this form

If you do decide to continue you will be asked to complete a consent tick-box, however, this does not affect your rights to withdraw at any time.

Contact details:

If you have any questions relating to this research or concerns about participating, please contact:

Researcher:

Catherine Palmer
Crp22@kent.ac.uk
Tel: 07868512706

Supervisor:

Prof. Roger Giner-Sorolla
r.s.giner-sorolla@kent.ac.uk

The School of Psychology Ethics Committee, University of Kent:

psychethics@kent.ac.uk

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Kent

Appendix B: Informed Consent

A study of faith and forgiveness.

A quantitative study utilising multiple choice psychometric questions to measure participant responses to forgiveness and the impact of personality on this.

University of Kent, Ethics Approval Number:

By signing this you are agreeing that:

1. You have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet
2. Any questions you may have had about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily
3. You are aware of the potential risks (if any) of participating in this study
4. You are participating in this research study voluntarily and without coercion
5. Data will be inspected by other scholars (not just at University of Kent) for audit and accuracy purposes. All data will be anonymised and any identifying details removed. Data will be stored securely until a peer review or audit is satisfied with the integrity of the data.
6. You may withdraw from this study for a period of 6 months from the date of participation, and all your data will be permanently deleted. After this period you data will be fully anonymised and therefore, withdrawal will not be possible.

Consent:

☐ I AGREE to the above

☐ I do NOT agree to the above

Consent will also be requested and recorded verbally prior to interview commencement.

Contact Details
If you have any questions relating to this research or concerns about participating, please contact:

Researcher:
Catherine Palmer
Crp22@kent.ac.uk
Tel: 07868512706

Supervisor:
Prof. Roger Giner-Sorolla

Appendix C: Participant Debrief

Participant Debrief

A study of faith and forgiveness

Thank you for your participation in this study.

This study aimed to explore the underlying emotional experiences of self-forgiveness in Catholic individuals. Particularly, whether Catholic individuals have a reduced tendency for self-forgiveness. In order to understand whether this trait was unique to Catholics we needed to compare other Christian denominations too.

Much of self-forgiveness research to date has focused on the cognitive processes involved looking at which components are necessary to facilitate self-forgiveness, yet there is surprisingly little research that explores the subjective, personal and emotive experiences of those who seek it.

Previous research (Palmer, 2020) suggest that although the doctrines of Christianity promote the importance of forgiveness, this tends to prioritise divine and interpersonal forgiveness whilst overlooking the importance of the self-forgiveness also included in this tripartite. Therefore, if self-forgiveness is indeed less of a priority than other forms of forgiveness for Catholic individuals, this might impact the internalized relationship that one has with their self - particularly in experiences of moral shame.

The Locus of Evaluation refers to the extent to which we rely upon the feedback and values of others to measure and assess our own moral standards. This concept may be valuable in understanding religious self-forgiveness practices since religiosity may require an individual to uphold both their social and moral obligation in order to retain their own conditions of worth.

Finally, this research aims to explore whether the lack of doctrines to support self-forgiving behaviours impact the proclivity to self-forgive, or whether Catholics believe in self-forgiveness at all.

If you have any questions following your participation in this study, please feel free to contact the research supervisor, Roger Giner-Sorolla at the following email r.s.giner-sorolla@kent.ac.uk

Thank you again for your co-operation.

Appendix D: Locus of Evaluation Inventory

Locus of Evaluation Inventory (Burcur, 2007)

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**

1. What other people think of me is important
2. I usually follow what others want me to do
3. When faced with a difficult decision, I depend on others for advice
4. I am easily embarrassed when I make a mistake
5. I want to tell others about my accomplishments
6. When I fail, I don't usually tell others
7. I frequently ask others if I look alright
8. I often worry about other people's opinions of me
9. I often think about my appearance
10. Regardless of what others say, I can be happy with myself*
11. I find it hard to act like myself when others are around
12. I often compare myself to others
13. When I make a mistake, I openly admit it*
14. My ability to complete a task often depends on whether others believe I can do it
15. I often rely on others to tell me what to do
16. It is hard for me to feel good about myself when I receive negative feedback
17. When others get upset at me it is hard for me to like myself
18. I am really comfortable only when I am by myself
19. I rarely wonder what others think of me. *

20. I often stand my ground even when others disagree with me*
21. I am more satisfied when I know others respect me than when they don't
22. It is hard for me to accept positive feedback from myself
23. I am more likely to accept positive feedback from someone else than myself
24. I feel worthless when I know I have disappointed someone
25. It upsets me when I feel I am being judged

Appendix E: The Heartland Forgiveness Scale

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (Thompson & Synder, 1999)

Almost always false of me		More often false of me		More often true of me		Almost always true of me
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	

1. Although I feel bad at first when I mess up, over time I can give myself some slack.
2. I hold grudges against myself for negative things I've done.
3. Learning from bad things that I've done helps me get over them.
4. It is really hard for me to accept myself once I've messed up.
5. With time I am understanding of myself for mistakes I've made.
6. I don't stop criticizing myself for negative things I've felt, thought, said, or done.
7. I continue to punish a person who has done something that I think is wrong.
8. With time I am understanding of others for the mistakes they've made.
9. I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me.

10. Although others have hurt me in the past, I have eventually been able to see them as good people.
11. If others mistreat me, I continue to think badly of them.
12. When someone disappoints me, I can eventually move past it.
13. When things go wrong for reasons that can't be controlled, I get stuck in negative thoughts about it.
14. With time I can be understanding of bad circumstances in my life.
15. If I am disappointed by uncontrollable circumstances in my life, I continue to think negatively about them.
16. I eventually make peace with bad situations in my life.
17. It's really hard for me to accept negative situations that aren't anybody's fault.
18. Eventually I let go of negative thoughts about bad circumstances that are beyond anyone's control

Appendix F: Independent Questions

Independent Questions:

1. Do you believe that it possible to self-forgive? (Yes/No)

2. Have you ever experienced self-forgiveness? (Yes/No)

3. Rate the following types of forgiveness from MOST important (1) to LEAST important (3) (Forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, forgiveness of God)