CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF FORGIVENESS CONVEYED BY SAYINGS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Félix F.M. NETO, Fac. Psicologia e Ciências Educação, Universidade do Porto, Portugal

Abstract

Proverbs contain important psychosocial information on topics like forgiveness. Forgiveness is a central topic in everyday life. From the personal level, to the family level, to the community level, to the international level, the quality of our relationships with others is largely determined by the conceptualizations we hold regarding forgiveness. The present work was aimed at examining a still unexplored aspect of forgiveness: the way in which proverbs conceive it. Two studies were conducted. The first study involved the selection and the categorization of proverbs on forgiveness. The selection of examined proverbs was made from documentary sources. Proverbs have been classified according to the conceptualizations of forgiveness (Mullet et al., 2004). The results have shown that this typology allows fitting a considerable number of proverbs about forgiveness. The second study verified if there were other conceptualizations of forgiveness conveyed by the proverbs besides those evidenced in the first study. Two new dimensional conceptualizations were found in the proverbs, forgiveness as immoral reciprocity and forgiveness without forgetfulness.

Key-words: Conceptualizations, forgiveness, proverbs.

Concerning myself this is just the second incursion made in the psychological study of proverbs. Last year I approached the colours of love conveyed by sayings about love (Neto, 2008). In this work I will consider the case of Forgiveness. "In the past few years, ..., the concept of interpersonal forgiveness has received explicit empirical attention from the perspectives of developmental..., social psychology ..., and clinical psychology... . These studies, ..., indicate that social scientists are becoming increasingly interested in the potential relevance of interpersonal forgiveness in human relationships, as well as for health and well-being. Nonetheless much work remains to be done on this interesting construct" (McCullough, 2000, p. 43). The present work was aimed at examining a still unexplored aspect of forgiveness: the way in which proverbs conceive it.

A definition of forgiveness

Although scientists have paid remarkably little attention to forgiveness, research on this topic has recently mushroomed (Worthington, 2005). With the upsurge in research on forgiveness has come a variety of definitions of the construct. Although there is overlap in these definitions, there are also substantial differences. For example, no consensus exists on the dimensions of forgiveness (Touissant, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001) or the steps and processes that it involves (Denton & Martin, 1998).

According to Subkoviac et al. (1992), "To forgive is overtone resentment toward an offender, not by denying ourselves the right to such feelings, but by endeavouring to view the offender with benevolence, compassion and even love, while recognizing that he or she has lost the right to them. The important points of this definition are as follows: (a) a person who forgives has suffered a deep hurt, thus shallowing resentment, (b) the offended person has a moral right to resentment, but overcomes it nonetheless, (c) a new response to the other accrues, including compassion and love, (d) this loving response occurs despite the realization that there is no obligation to love the offender" (p. 3).

In this definition several important aspects of forgiveness are emphasized. Firstly, forgiveness is defined as a restoration of good feelings (benevolence, compassion, love) toward an offender. Forgiveness is thus defined primarily as an emotional construct, or, more appropriately, as a radical change in the person, intervening at the emotional level.

Secondly, forgiveness is defined as concerning only two persons: an offended and his/her offender. Forgiveness is therefore viewed primarily as an interpersonal construct. It is thus not conceivable for an offender to forgive an abstract institution (e.g., a political party), or to forgive somebody else (e.g., the descendants) in the name of an offended person. It is still less conceivable to forgive a natural event (e.g., an earthquake or an epidemic). Note that the first aspect does not imply the second aspect. Both aspects must be present for the emotional change to be considered as true forgiveness. For the grand-daughter of a victim it is certainly possible to change "positively" her feelings towards the grandson of her grandfather's offender, although she is not the victim and he is not the offender. According to the definition, this cannot, however, be termed forgiveness.

Thirdly, what changes is the quality of the feelings. The offence that has led the offended person to resent the offender, at least for some time, is not annulled. It still persists as such. Forgiveness is thus viewed as primarily different from a justice construct. As a result, the offender can still be blamed and punished by an appropriate instance (e.g., court) for what he/she did, and this independently of the offended people.

In this definition several other aspects of forgiveness are less explicit. Firstly, the objective of forgiveness is not stated as such. It can, however, be easily deduced from the terms used: to overcome resentment. In a family, in a group of people or in a society, where most people experience resentment towards others (and possibly seek revenge), social harmony may appear seriously compromised. Therefore one of the main objectives of forgiveness is the preservation and enhancement of social harmony within (reduced or extended) groups. Forgiveness is thus also viewed as a pro-social construct.

Secondly, if the objective of forgiveness is to maintain social harmony, then it cannot be, in itself, a bad thing, both for groups and for individuals inside the groups. In this case forgiveness is viewed as a moral construct: to forgive is considered as basically good.

The present work

The present work was aimed at examining the way in which proverbs conceptualize forgiveness. Forgiveness is a central topic in everyday life (Worthington, 2005). From the personal level, to the family level, to the community level, to the international level, the quality of our relationships with others is largely determined by the conceptualizations we hold regarding forgiveness. These conceptualizations have potentially important repercussions on the way we conceive family life (e.g., parenting), behaviour at the workplace (e.g., in case of conflict with colleagues), the functioning of institutions (e.g., the nature of the justice system), international politics (e.g., truth commissions), and psychological counselling (e.g., use of forgiveness in therapy). Examining the way people conceptualize forgiveness is important for practical as well as theoretical reasons. "The beliefs that you hold about forgiveness open or close possibilities for you, determine your willingness to forgive, and, as a result, profoundly influence the emotional tone of your life" (Casarjian, 1992, p. 12). In other words, the conceptualizations you hold about forgiveness may have important repercussions on your well-being (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). It is because forgiveness appeared to be conceptualized in so many different, and sometimes antagonistic, ways that Enright and Fitzgibbons (2000) recommended that before applying their process model of forgiveness in therapeutic sessions, a clear definition of forgiveness be given to the potential clients.

It should be noted that despite their close relationship, conceptualizations of forgiveness and willingness to forgive are separate constructs. Conceptualization of forgiveness refers to the nature of forgiveness and the way it is defined. Willingness to forgive refers to the (daily) practice of forgiveness. Conceptualizations of forgiveness have recently been studied by

Mullet, Girard, and Bakhshi (2004) on a French sample. Four conceptualization factors were identified. *Change of Heart* expresses the idea that forgiveness supposes the replacement of negative emotions toward the offender by positive emotions. *Forgiveness is Good* expresses the idea that forgiveness encourages the offender to accept past wrongs and behave better in the future. *Forgiveness is Bad* expresses the view that forgiveness is a process that devaluates both parties. Finally, *More-Than-Dyadic Process* expresses the idea that forgiveness is not limited to the individuals directly involved in the conflict and may extend to close relationships or even institutions (e.g., the state or the church).

Only a minority of participants agreed with the idea that forgiving supposes a change of heart (regaining affection or sympathy towards the offender), and with the idea that forgiveness can encourage the offender's repentance. More participants, however, agreed with the ideas that the forgiver can be someone other than the offended (but with a close relationship to the offended) and that the forgiven can be an unknown offender or an abstract institution. Very few participants agreed with the idea that forgiveness is immoral.

The present work intended to evidence the underlying conceptualizations to sayings about forgiveness. Two studies have been carried through. In the first study I intended to verify whether the conceptualizations of forgiveness evidenced by Mullet et al. (2004) were underlying to the conceptualizations conveyed for sayings about forgiveness. The second study intended to verify if there are other conceptualizations of forgiveness in sayings beyond the evidenced ones in the first study.

STUDY 1: Forgiveness

The present work was aimed at answering the following question: "Which are the conceptualizations of forgiveness conveyed by proverbs about forgiveness?"

The present study reports one exploratory research on the sayings analysis regarding forgiveness sayings. This research involved the selection and categorization of sayings on forgiveness. The selected sayings have been submitted to a classification made by judges according to types of forgiveness, making it possible to point the predominant conceptualizations of forgiveness.

1. Method

1.1. Material

Fifty four proverbs about forgiveness were collected from several sources (Brazão, 1998; Costa, 1999; Estanqueiro, 1996; Machado, 1998; Moreira, 1997; Parente, 2005; Santos, 2000; Soares, 2005).

1.2. Sample

The sample was constituted by 26 participants (20 females and 6 males). Mean ages were 48.3 (SD = 12.7). All participants had a degree. More than two thirds of the participants declared they believe in God (69%), however only about a quarter (27%) declared they attended church on a regular basis.

1.3. Procedure

The task of the sample consisted of classifying the sayings body in one of the four categories evidenced previously on the conceptualizations the forgiveness (Mullet et al., 2004). The instructions given to the participants were as follows: "A number of proverbs will be presented. For each saying indicate please which of the four categories presented is that one that more applies to it. If you think that none of these four categories applies to one proverb indicates answer 9. For each one of the four categories we are going to indicate its definition and an example, between many possible examples.

a. Change of Heart

It expresses the idea that forgiveness supposes the replacement of negative emotions toward the offender by positive emotions.
For example, "To forgive someone necessarily means to start feeling affection toward him or her again".

b. Forgiveness is Good

It expresses the idea that forgiveness encourages the offender to accept past wrongs and behave better in the future.
For example, "To forgive someone means to encourage him or her to behave better in the future."

c. Forgiveness is Bad

It expresses the view that forgiveness is a process that devaluates both parties.
For example, "To forgive someone means to encourage him or her to behave wrongly again."

d. More-Than-Dyadic Process

It expresses the idea that forgiveness is not limited to individuals directly involved in the conflict and may extend to close relationships or even institutions (e.g., the state or the church). For example, "It is possible to forgive the person(s) responsible for an institution (e.g., the state, the church, an association, etc."

1.4. Results

First, the number of judges who had classified each one of 54 sayings collected in one of the four categories was verified. One found that 14 sayings had not been classified by at least 2/3 of the judges.

Then it was verified how many of the remaining sayings had not gotten an agreement in its classification by at least for half of the judges. One found that 11 sayings had not gotten a consensus in the classification in one same category by at least half of the judges. Therefore, the judges had agreed to classify in the same category 29 of 54 selected sayings.

(a) Twelve proverbs were classified in the category "Forgiveness is good":
> The most beautiful of virtues is forgiveness.
> Guild forgiven, guilt repaired.
> Better forgive than cure.
> It is better to forgive than to punish.
> Much love, much forgiveness.
> Do not lift the sword over the head of whom you have asked for forgiveness.
> Pardon is the best revenge.
> Forgiveness is divine.
> Pardon eases suffering.
> The first error deserves forgiveness.
> Forgiveness is the most noble neighbourhood.
> Forgive and you will be forgiven.

(b) Ten proverbs were classified in the category "Forgiveness is bad":
> Kindness and forgiveness only cause ingratitude.
> Pardon makes the thief.
> Forgiving the bad encourages the bad.
> To forgive the bad is to say that he is.
> To forgive the bad is to damn the good.
> To forgive without forgetting is the mercy of Satan.
> Those who pardon make thieves.
> To forgive bad is to increase wickedness.
> Those who forgive the wolf endanger the sheep.
> Those who forgive the bad tell him that he is.

(c) Six proverbs were classified in the category "Change of heart":

> With a tear of venom comes forgiveness.
>
> Thief who steals from thief has one hundred years of forgiveness.
>
> Forgive the offender and become the winner.
>
> Forgive yourself while loving yourself.
>
> Who hears tear sis closer to forgiving.
>
> Forgiving the evil makes me feel good about myself.

(d) Only one proverb was classified in the category "More than a process between two persons": *From such festivals, such pardons.*

Therefore more than half of sayings have been classified by means of the conceptualizations of forgiveness evidenced by Mullet et al. (2004). However there was still an important body that was not included in this theoretical model. Are there other conceptualizations of forgiveness conveyed through sayings? To answer to this question we conducted a second study

STUDY 2: Three questions

Even if more than half of the sayings had been classified in the one of three conceptualizations of forgiveness previously evidenced (Forgiveness is Good, Forgiveness is Bad, and Change of Heart), a certain number of proverbs were not classified in these categories. This study seeks to answer three questions:

(1) Will there be other conceptualizations of forgiveness conveyed by proverbs about forgiveness beyond those three?

(2) Do laypeople agree with the conceptualizations of forgiveness encountered in proverbs?

(3) How are these conceptualizations of forgiveness related to some characteristics, such as socio-demographic factors, and willingness to forgive?

We look to answer these questions among older people, as it can be hoped that they have experienced more contact with the sayings than other populations.

Forgivingness has been defined by Roberts (1995) as "the disposition to abort one's anger (or altogether to miss getting angry) at persons one takes to have wronged one culpably, by seeing them in the benevolent terms provided by reasons characteristic of forgiving" (p. 290). As a result, forgivingness must be carefully distinguished from forgiveness. Forgivingness is an overall disposition to forgive, a disposition that manifests itself in most circumstances in life. Forgiveness, by contrast, only applies to particular circumstances (particular offenses).

Four distinct aspects of forgivingness (dispositional forgiveness) have been recently put forward (Mullet et al., 2003; Muñoz Sastre, Vinsonneau, Chabrol and Mullet, 2005):

(i) Lasting resentment; that is, the difficulty at escaping the unforgiveness state, by avenging or forgiving or choosing another path,

(ii) Sensitivity to the circumstances of the offence, that is to say, responding to the offender's apologies or to the pressures of others to forgive or not forgive,

(iii) overall Propensity to forgive, and

(iv) overall Propensity to avenge. These four constructs illustrate the process through which most people have to pass after having been severely offended (Worthington, 2006). When one is the victim of an intentional offense, a feeling of resentment seems logical; the duration of which would usually depend on the circumstances of the offense, the attitude of the offender and, of course, the personality of the victim. Individual differences concerning the intensity and duration of resentment were sufficiently notable to help identify a separate factor that was called 'Lasting resentment' (Rye *et al.*, 2001, McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). The end of the resentment or unforgiveness state could take many forms, which are probably directly in relation to the strength of the resentment, the victim's personality, the environment, as well as the offender's personality. Individual differences in relation to sensitivity to circumstances were sufficiently important to help identify another separate factor that was called Sensitivity to personal and social circumstances (Neto & Mullet, 2004). Different forms of the resentment state would naturally end with either forgiveness or revenge, or with other types of closures such as formal complaint or oblivion. Individual differences in relation to forgiveness and revenge were sufficiently important to help identify two other separate factors that were called 'Willingness to forgive' and 'Willingness to avenge' (Stuckless & Goranson, 1992).

It is important to keep in mind that the absence of revenge does not necessarily mean forgiveness. The victim could possibly be still in the resentment mode, have made a formal complaint, or he/she could also be trying to forget (Worthington, 2006). It is also important to note that the presence of resentment is not exactly synonymous with revenge. Forgiveness could still follow the state of resentment, even a lasting one (Worthington, 2006). Thus, the presence of (moderate to strong) statistical correlations between willingness to forgiveness, willingness to avenge and lasting resentment do not constitute an argument for mixing these three concepts into one. These statistical correlations are in fact directly related to the nature of the process that goes from offense to resentment, which would end by either forgiveness or revenge (Mullet, Neto & Riviere, 2005).

1. Method

1.1. Participants

The participants came from the region of Porto and were recruited in public places; cafés, shops, streets. There were 109 participants (65 females and 44 males). Age ranged from 65 to 90. Mean ages were 70.3 ($SD = 5.8$). Thirty eight per cent of the participants declared they had completed secondary education, 82% declared they believe in God, and 41% declared they attended church on a regular basis. The participation rates were 90%. The data were gathered in September 2008, and all participants were fluent in Portuguese.

1.2. Material

The material was composed of a questionnaire containing:

(a) **Proverb endorsement task.** The proverb endorsement task included 54 proverbs about forgiveness (see Study 1). Some of these proverbs are listed in Table 1 (those with the higher loadings in a subsequent factor analysis).

(b) **Forgivingness questionnaire** (Mullet et al., 2003 ; Munoz Sastre et al., 2005). It was composed of 20 sentences expressing willingness to forgive under various conditions, five for each of the four factors. Examples of items are: "I feel unable to forgive even if the offender has begged for forgiveness" (Lasting resentment factor); "I can forgive more easily when I feel good" (Sensitivity to circumstances factor); "I can forgive easily even when the offender has not begged fro forgiveness" (Willingness to forgive factor); and "I can forgive only after I have been able to take revenge on the offender" (Willingness to avenge factor). The alpha values in the current study were .85 (Lasting resentment), .72 (Sensitivity to circumstances), .91 (Willingness to forgive), and .87 (Willingness to avenge)

A 11-cm scale was printed after each sentence. This was chosen to provide enough latitude in making responses in case many of them would be concentrated at one or the other of the extremes of the scale. The two extremes of the scales were labelled *completely disagree* and *completely agree*.

(c) After completion of the scales, participants were requested to complete a short biographical form, including questions such as, the sex, age, religion, education, and ethnicity.

1.3. Procedure

Each participant answered individually in the street or in a shop depending on what each participant found most convenient. The experimenter explained to each participant what was expected of him/her. He/she was to read a certain number of sentences expressing a feeling or a belief about forgiveness and rate his/her degree of agreement regarding the content of each sentence. The experimenter was present when the participants filled in the questionnaires.

1.4. Results

Each rating by each participant was converted to a numerical value expressing the distance (from 1 to 11) between the point on the response scale and the left anchor, serving as the origin. These numerical values were then subjected to graphic and statistical analyses.

An exploratory factor analysis was first conducted for the proverb endorsement task items. Using the scree test to determine the number of factors arising from this analysis, it appeared that five interpretable factors emerged which accounted for 57% of the variance. The items with the higher loadings in each factor were retained and subjected to Varimax rotation. This five-factor solution accounted for 70.4% of the variance.
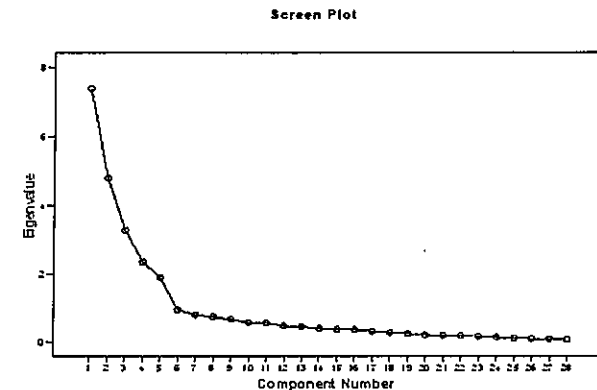

Figure 1 Scree of proverb endorsement task items

The first factor explained 26.5% of the variance. The factor was composed of 8 proverbs. We called this factor *Forgiveness is Bad* since it loaded positively on items expressing the ideas of immorality, approval of the offence, and encouragement and negation of responsibility of the offender. The scale had an internal consistency of .89. The second factor explained 17.2% of the variance. The factor was composed of 7 proverbs. We called this factor *Forgiveness is Good* since it loaded positively on items expressing the ideas of virtue, regret and repentance in the offende. The scale had an internal consistency of .94. The third factor explained 11.7% of the variance. The factor was composed of 5 proverbs. We called it *Forgiveness as a Change of Heart Process* since it loaded positively on items expressing the ideas of regained sympathy, reconciliation, and cessation of anger and resentment. The scale had an internal consistency of .87. The fourth factor

explained 8.3% of the variance. The factor was composed of 5 proverbs. We called it *Forgiveness as Immoral Reciprocity* since it loaded positively on items expressing the ideas of approval to steal from thief. The scale had an internal consistency of .77. The fifth factor explained 6.7% of the variance. The factor was composed of 3 proverbs. We called it *Forgiveness without Forgetfulness* since it loaded positively on items expressing the idea of no oblivion. The scale had an internal consistency of .74.

Table 1 Results of the factor analysis and means and standard deviations on the whole sample

			Factors				
Items	I	II	III	IV	V	M	SD
Pardon makes the thief.	.72	3.74	3.01				
Forgiving the bad encourages the bad.	.86	3.88	3.39				
To forgive the bad is to say that he is.	.90	3.84	3.41				
To forgive the bad is to damn the good.	.83	3.55	3.15				
Those who pardon make thieves	.87	4.05	3.50				
To forgive bad is to increase weakness.	.73	3.41	2.95				
Those who forgive the wolf endanger the sheep.	.80	4.69	3.59				
Those who forgive the bad tell him that he is.	.89	3.69	3.38				
The most beautiful of virtues is forgiveness		.65				7.77	2.97
Better forgive than cure		.77				7.51	3.60
It is better to forgive than to punish		.79				7.87	3.25
Do not lift the sword over the head of whom you asked for		.81				8.61	2.88
Forgive and you will see, as you find.		.63				7.97	3.21
Those who confess deserve forgiveness.		.75				7.91	3.01
Forgive and you will be forgiven.		.67				7.73	3.12
Forgiveness is the best revenge.			.86			4.71	3.71
Forgiveness is the noblest revenge.			.89			4.50	3.69
Forgive the offender and become the winner.			.75			5.95	3.86
To forgive injury is the most noble revenge.			.82			4.34	3.29
Forgive him the evil that he does for me.			.58			5.66	3.67
With a tear of venom comes forgiveness.				.63		4.20	3.02
Thief who steals from thief has one hundred years of forgiveness				.76		4.03	3.57
Forgive him half. I forgive him the other half (the deadbeat).				.70		3.22	2.65
One who steals from the thief has one hundred years of				.80		3.39	3.12
Forgiveness is the happy face, revenge is the failure				.59		4.65	2.54
People forgive, but to forget is another conversation.					.86	8.59	2.86
To forgive is not to forget					.82	8.83	2.96
He who forgives does not forget.					.69	7.60	3.63
Eigenvalue	7.4	4.8	3.3	2.3	1.9		
Variance	26.5	17.2	11.7	8.3	6.7		

For each five factors a mean score was computed by averaging the corresponding item scores. Most participants disagree with the idea that forgiveness is immoral and can have negative consequences on the forgiver. As regards the idea that forgiveness can have positive consequences on the forgiver, most of the participants agree. Many participants tend to disagree with the idea that forgiveness is a "change of heart process". Most of the participants clearly disagree with the idea of forgiveness as an immoral reciprocity. Finally, most of the participants agree with the idea that to forgive is not to forget.

Table 2 shows the results of a correlation analysis computed between the participants' scores on the five conceptualization factors and some of the participants' characteristics. Age was not related to conceptualizations of forgiveness. Gender was correlated with Forgiveness is Good and Forgiveness as Immoral Reciprocity. Women tended to give higher scores to Forgiveness is Good and Forgiveness as Immoral Reciprocity than men. Another significant relationship concerned Forgiveness is Good and educational level. People with a lower educational level tended to have higher 'Forgiveness is Good' scores. Believers and people attending church on a regular basis showed lower scores in 'Forgiveness is Bad' and higher scores in 'Forgiveness is Good'. Furthermore, people attending church on a regular basis tended to have lower scores in 'Change of heart' and 'Forgiveness without forgetting'.

As regards forgivingness factors, lasting resentment was related to 'Forgiveness is bad' and 'Forgiveness is good'. People with higher lasting resentment tended to have higher 'Forgiveness is bad' scores and lower 'Forgiveness is good' scores. Sensitivity to circumstances was linked to all factors of conceptualizations of forgiveness. Old people with higher sensitivity to circumstances showed higher 'Forgiveness is bad', 'Forgiveness is good', 'Change of heart', and 'Immoral reciprocity' scores and lower forgiveness without 'Forgetfulness' scores. Willingness to forgive was related to 'Forgiveness is bad' and 'Forgiveness is good', and 'Change of heart'. People with higher 'Willingness to forgive' tended to have lower 'Forgiveness is bad' scores and higher 'Forgiveness is good' and 'Change of heart' scores. Finally, willingness to avenge was related to 'Forgiveness is bad' and 'Forgiveness is good'. People with higher 'Willingness to avenge' tended to have higher 'Forgiveness is bad' scores and lower 'Forgiveness is good'.

Table 2: Correlations between scores of conceptualizations of forgiveness and characteristics of the participants

CHARACTERISTICS	BAD	GOOD F	CHANGE	IMMORAL	FORGETFULNESS
Sociodemographic					
Age	-.17	.04	-.03	.02	.13
Gender	-.14	.20*	.04	.34***	-.06
Education	.15	-.40***	-.18	-.03	-.08
Believer	-.27**	.31***	-.04	.06	-.10
Church attendance	-	.21*	-.26**	.18	-.23*
Forgivingness factors					
Lasting resentment	.55***	-.47***	.12	.16	.14
Sensitivity to	.42***	.19*	.28**	.35***	-.22*
Willingness to forgive	-.26**	.58***	.22*	.10	-.13
Willingness to avenge	.39***	-.73***	-.02	-.01	-.01

* p < .05; ** p< .01; *** p < .001.

Discussion

The main objective of the present work was to examine an unexplored aspect of forgiveness: the conceptualizations of forgiveness encountered in proverbs. Two studies were conducted to examine the content and the structure of the concept of forgiveness from the perspective of proverbs. Overall, the results of these exploratory studies provide support for the idea that proverbs have and use conceptualizations of forgiveness.

In the first study most of the proverbs about forgiveness have been classified in three conceptualizations of forgiveness previously identified (Forgiveness is Bad, Forgiveness is Good, and Change of Heart). Although a small minority of forgiveness researchers have discussed the potential negative or "dark side" of forgiveness (e. g., Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998), most view forgiveness positively and focus their attention on the potential benefits of forgiveness (e.g., Witvlief et al., 2001). We found, however, that proverbs conveyed negative aspects involved in the forgiveness process. Proverbs listed features such as feelings of weakness or of being a push-over, giving the person permission to hurt you again. The finding that proverbs see forgiveness as having negative features is important because this is a component that has not been stressed in most forgiveness intervention programs.

The findings of the second study showed that proverbs have an internal structure. More specifically, besides three conceptualizations of forgiveness already evidenced by previous research among lay people, two other conceptualizations were found in proverbs: Forgiveness as Immoral Reciprocity and Forgiveness without Forgetfulness.

One set of proverbs was linked to forgiveness as an immoral construct. The mean score of this factor was very low. Mean scores observed on the eight core items ranged from 3.41 ("To forgive bad is to increase weakedness") to 4.69 ("Those who forgive the wolf endanger the sheep"). As a result, very few disagreements around the negative effects of forgiveness on offenders are to be expected between people in daily life; that is, that forgiveness as being basically moral is part of everyday commonsense (Semdslund 1997).

One second set of proverbs connected with the idea of social harmony were responded to in the same way, allowing for the emergence of a factor that was called Forgiveness is Good. Means scores observed on the seven core items ranged from 7.73 ("Forgive and you will be forgiven") to 8.61 ("Do not lift the sword over the head of whom you asked for forgiveness"). The main message conveyed by this factor was that to forgive is to set a good example to others. As a result, they become better people, they acknowledge their wrongs, regret their acts, and repair their faults.

A third set of proverbs was conceptualized as a "change of heart" process, that is, as the replacement of negative emotions toward the offender by positive emotions toward him/her. To what extent do people differ from one another at considering forgiveness as a "change of heart" process? The answer to this question was moderately negative. A set of proverbs linked to emotional change construct were answered in the same way, allowing the emergence of a Forgiveness as a Change of Heart Process. However, the scores observed on the five core proverbs were not very high (M=5.03, out of 11), ranging from 4.34 ("To forgive injury is the most noble revenge") to 5.95 ("Forgive the offender and become the winner"). It seems fair to state that substantial disagreements around the psychological nature of forgiveness are to be expected between people in daily life. Only a minority of people seem to believe that forgiving somebody presupposes regaining affection or sympathy toward the offender.

A fourth set of proverbs was conceptualized as "immoral reciprocity". The mean score of this factor was very low. Mean scores observed on the five core items ranged from 3.22 ("Forgive him half, I forgive him the other half (the deadbeat))" to 4.65 ("Forgiveness is the happy

face, revenge is the failure"). As a result, very few disagreements around the negative effects of forgiveness on offenders other offenders are to be expected in daily life.

A fifth set of proverbs was conceptualized as "no forgetfulness", that is, people may forgive but it does not imply to forget. The scores observed on the three core proverbs were high, ranging from 7.60 ("He who forgives does not forget" to 8.83 ("To forgive is not to forget"). It seems fair to state that substantial agreements around the nature of forgiveness without forgetfulness are to be expected between people in daily life. Researchers also have argued that forgiveness does not mean that you forget the incident or deny that pain has been incurred. On the contrary, acknowledging that one has been wronged and has a right to better treatment is critical for forgiveness.

Taken together, these results provide support for the idea that proverbs have and use conceptualizations of forgiveness. This study has several limitations. First, the basic design of this investigation consisted of cross-sectional sampling of the population. A different shortcoming concerns generalisations of these results to settings different of ours; they should proceed cautiously. Future research is needed on the way forgiveness is conceptualized in proverbs in other age groups and cultures.

Future research using the five subscales of conceptualizations conveyed by proverbs is needed to explore whether the five-factor structure found in the Portuguese sample is applicable to other cultures and to determine if there are important cultural differences regarding the conceptualizations of forgiveness. Although there is little cross-cultural data on forgiveness, it is possible that whether proverbs are conveyed by individualistic or collectivistic cultures could influence the understanding of forgiveness.

References

Baumeister, R. F., Exline, J.J., & Sommer, K. L. (1998). The victim role, grudge theory, and two dimensions of forgiveness. In E. L. Worthington, Jr. (Ed.), *Dimensions of forgiveness: Psychological research and theological perspectives* (pp. 79-104). Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press.

Brazão, J. R. (1998). *Os provérbios estão vivos no Algarve*. Lisboa: Notícias Editorial.

Cesarjian, R. (1992). *Forgiveness: A bold choice for a peaceful heart*. New York: Bantam Books.

Costa, J. R. M. (1999). *O livro dos provérbios portugueses*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença

Denton, R. T., & Martin, M. W. (1998). Defining forgiveness: An empirical exploration of process and role. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 26*, 281-292.

Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2000). *Helping clients forgive: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington: A.P.A.

Estanqueiro, A (1996). *A sabedoria dos provérbios*. Lisboa: Editorial Presença.

Machado, J. P. (1998). *O grande livro dos provérbios*. Lisboa: Notícias Editorial.

McCullough, M. E. (2000). Forgiveness as a human strength: Theory, measurement, and links to well-being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 19*, 43-55.

McCullough, M. E., & Hoyt, W. T. (2002). Transgression-Related motivational dispositions: Personality substrates of forgiveness and their links to the big five. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 1556-1573.

Moreira, A (1997). *Provérbios portugueses*, 3.ed. Lisboa: Notícias Editorial.

Mullet, E., Barros, J., Frongia, L., Usai, V., Neto, F., & Shafighi, S. (2003). Religious involvement and the forgiving personality. *Journal of Personality, 71* (1), 1-19.

Mullet, E., Girard, M., & Bakhshi, P. (2004). Conceptualizations of forgiveness. *European Psychologist, 9*, 78-86.

Mullet, E., Neto, F., & Rivière, S. (2005). Personality and its effects on resentment, revenge, and forgiveness and on self-forgiveness. In Worthington, E. L. (Ed.), *Handbook of Forgiveness* (pp. 159-182). New York: Routledge.

Muñoz Sastre, M. T., Vinsonneau, G., Chabrol, H., & Mullet, E. (2005). Forgiveness and the paranoid personality style. *Personality and Individual Differences, 38*, 765-772.

Neto, F, & Mullet, E. (2004). Personality, self-esteem, and self-construal as correlates of forgiveness. *European Journal of Personality, 18*, 15-30.

Neto, F. (2008). The colors of love conveyed by sayings about love/Cores do amor veiculadas por provérbios osbre o amor. In O. Lauhakangas & R. Soares, *1st Interdisciplinary colloquium on proverbs/1° colóquio interdisciplinar sobre provérbios*, pp. 348-362. Tavira: International Association of Paremiology.

Neto, F., Pinto, M. da C., & Mullet, E. (2007). Intergroup forgiveness: East Timorese and Angolan perspectives. *Journal of Peace Research, 44*, 711-729.

Parente, S. (2005). *O livro dos provérbios*. Lisboa: Ancora Editora.

Roberts, R. C. (1995). Forgivingness. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 32*, 289-306.

Rye, M. S., Loiacono, D. M., Folck, C. D., Olszewski, B. T., Heim, T. A., & Madia, B. P. (2001). Evaluation of the psychometric properties of two forgiveness scales. *Current Psychology, 20*, 260-277.

Santos, M. A M. (2000). *Dicionário de provérbios, adágios, ditados, máximas, aforismos e frases feitas*. Porto: Porto Editora.

Smedslund, J. (1997). *The strucuture of psychological common sense*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Soares, R. J. B. (2002). *Do ano ao santo tudo é encanto: Ditos populares ao longo do ano*. Tavira: Edição de autor.

Stuckless, N., & Goranson, R. (1992). The vengeance scale: Development of a measure of attitudes toward revenge. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 7*, 25-42.

Subkoviak, M. J., Enright, R. D., e Wu, C. R. (1992). *Current developments selected to measuring forgiveness*: Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Chicago, October.

Touissant, L. L., Williams, D. R., Musick, M. A., & Everson, S. A. (2001). Forgiveness and health: Age differences in a U.S. probability sample. *Journal of Adult Development, 8*, 249-257.

Vitvliet, C. V., Ludwig, T. E., & Van Der Laan, K. L. (2001). Granting forgiveness or harbouring grudges: Implications for emotion, physiology, and health. *Psychological Science, 121*(2), 117-123.

Worthington, E. L. (Ed.) (2005). *Handbook of forgiveness*. New York : Routledge.

Worthington, E. L., Jr. (2006). *Forgiveness and reconciliation: Theory and application*. New York: Routledge.

Curriculum vitae

Félix F.M. Neto is Professor of Psychology in the Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação at the University of Porto, Portugal. His research interests include social psychology and cross-cultural psychology (especially migration and mental health). He has published 14 books and some 200 scientific articles.

================= /// =================