


Article

'Doh Beat Up' and 'Doh Take It on:' Exploring Direct and Indirect Associations Between Religious Commitment, Self-Forgiveness and Self-Condensation in Trinidad and Tobago

Loren L. Toussaint ^{1,*} , Amanda K. Thomas ² , Jon R. Webb ³ , Colwick M. Wilson ⁴, David R. Williams ^{5,6} , Sandra D. Reid ⁷ , Sebastian Binyamin Skalski-Bednarz ^{8,9} , Janusz Surzykiewicz ^{9,10}  and Everett L. Worthington, Jr. ¹¹ 

¹ Department of Psychology, Luther College, Decorah, IA 52101, USA

² Office of Research and Innovation, University of the Southern Caribbean, St. Joseph, Trinidad and Tobago; thomasa@usc.edu.tt

³ Department of Community, Family, and Addiction Sciences, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409, USA; jon.r.webb@ttu.edu

⁴ School of Social Sciences, University of the Southern Caribbean, St. Joseph, Trinidad and Tobago; colwick@usc.edu.tt

⁵ Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, MA 02115, USA; dwilliam@hsph.harvard.edu

⁶ Department of African and African American Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA

⁷ School of Medicine, The University of the West Indies (The UWI), Champs Fleurs, Trinidad and Tobago; sandra.reid@uwi.edu

⁸ Institute of Psychology, Ignatianum University in Cracow, 31501 Cracow, Poland; sebastian.skalski@ignatianum.edu.pl

⁹ Faculty of Philosophy and Education, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, 85072 Eichstätt, Germany; janusz.surzykiewicz@ku.de

¹⁰ Faculty of Education, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, 01938 Warsaw, Poland

¹¹ Department of Psychology, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284, USA; eworth@vcu.edu

* Correspondence: touslo01@luther.edu; Tel.: +1-(563)-387-1647

Abstract

The cultural discourse metaphors 'doh beat up' and 'doh take it on' in Trinidad and Tobago capture the local sentiments of releasing self-condemnation after experiencing failure, wrongdoing, or circumstances beyond one's control. In this study, we examined the direct and indirect relationships between religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation. Data were collected using an online survey of 259 adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 40$; 76% female) living in Trinidad and Tobago. Path analyses showed that higher religious commitment was directly associated with lower levels of shame. Value reorientation self-forgiveness was associated with increased guilt and shame, while esteem restoration self-forgiveness was associated with reduced shame. Tests of indirect effects showed that religious commitment was indirectly associated with self-condemnation through self-forgiveness. Our findings suggest that religious commitment and self-forgiveness may play a protective role in relation to self-condemnation among Caribbean adults. Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation of these relationships.

Keywords: shame; guilt; self-condemnation; self-forgiveness; religious commitment; Trinidad and Tobago



Academic Editor: Antonio Muñoz-García

Received: 14 April 2026

Revised: 18 May 2026

Accepted: 21 May 2026

Published: 25 May 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and

conditions of the [Creative Commons](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

[Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

1. Introduction

1.1. Self-Condensation

Within the last decade, the [Pan-American Health Organization \(2018\)](#) has documented the upward trend of mental health issues and emotional distress within the Caribbean in relation to anxiety, depression, and somatic disorders. In this study, we address self-condemnation as a form of emotional distress, and we operationalize it with two of its dimensions, shame and guilt. Within the small island states of Trinidad and Tobago, self-condemnation might be considered to consist largely of these two emotions.

In order to understand these phenomena locally, we applied contextually relevant perspectives to focus on the possible historical, psychological, and societal factors driving self-condemnation (both shame and guilt) ([Wint 2001](#)). In doing so, we aimed to demonstrate some sensitivity in understanding Trinidad and Tobago's adult population's orientations towards shame and guilt, while living within a collectivistic culture promoting adherence to group norms and the subsuming of individual feelings within the wider society and extended family relationships ([Barrow 1996](#)).

According to local cultural discourse norms, shame is the tendency to 'beat yourself up', 'cry down', or 'feel bad' about oneself ([Winer 2009](#)). Correspondingly, shame is negative self-evaluation brought on by feelings of "inadequacy, inferiority and deficiency" and the strong criticism individuals direct towards themselves after falling short of self or societal expectations ([Rice et al. 2018](#), p. 47). Guilt is experienced when people act wrongly in opposition to their values, and is also experienced when persons have little or no ability to right inflicted wrongs or change undue circumstances ([Cornish et al. 2018](#)). Thus, guilt is not merely an immediate feeling when one believes one has done wrong, but can be much longer lasting if one feels that one cannot right wrongs.

These emotions are particularly problematic when connected to victimization trauma and the tendency to accept personal responsibility for maladaptive circumstances beyond an individual's control ([Kim et al. 2011](#)). Such a framing aligns with evidence from Trinidad and Tobago documenting exposure to multiple traumatic events and their psychological sequelae ([Rollocks et al. 2013](#); [Wallace and Rowtham 2025](#)). Locally, this is also known as 'taking it on' implying that guilt imposes a heavy burden on an individual's mental and physical well-being ([Winer 2009](#)). While the negative emotions of shame and guilt can be related to one another and can arise from the same experiential catalyst, when distinguishing between the two, shame is experienced in regard to the self as an entity and guilt is felt in the context of behavior ([Kurtz 2007](#)). That is, shame implies that there is something wrong with how individuals feel about themselves on an inherent level, whereas guilt implies that there is something wrong with an individual's behavior.

Interestingly, studies in the Caribbean region have been conducted regarding feelings of shame, with very few studies regarding the levels of guilt experienced among adults. However, the larger body of extant research has conclusively shown that when shame and guilt, as debilitating emotions, are experienced for prolonged time periods, they can result in psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression, and maladjusted and disruptive behaviors ([Rice et al. 2018](#); [Skalski-Bednarz et al. 2024b](#); [Webb and Boye 2024](#)).

1.2. Religious Commitment

The virtues and practices associated with strong and sustained religious commitment are integral for human flourishing ([VanderWeele 2017](#)). Our effort to test the direct associations between religious commitment and self-condemnation and the indirect associations between religious commitment and self-condemnation through self-forgiveness was motivated by three lines of research.

First, religious commitment is defined by the extent to which an individual follows religious values, beliefs, and practices in their everyday lives and in close fellowship with those who hold similar beliefs (Worthington et al. 2003). Regular participation in worship, religious services, and adhering to religious teachings on spiritual virtues such as kindness, compassion, and forgiveness have been shown to motivate positive attitudes and behaviors among individuals (Worthington et al. 2003). Additional benefits linked to religious lifestyles and belonging to faith-based communities include: more stable interpersonal relationships, higher life satisfaction, and greater mental wellness (VanderWeele et al. 2017).

Second, the Caribbean region is composed of many religious communities. These communities attach value to religious and spiritual customs and traditions in their community members' everyday lives (Reynolds et al. 2016). Religious commitment is also of interest based on the important roles of religious leaders and places of worship in Trinidad and Tobago (Hilton 2002). Of note, previous studies conducted on local populations by Toussaint and colleagues (Toussaint et al. 2015) have demonstrated the importance of religiousness and religious commitment as culturally relevant factors that significantly reduce tendencies towards negative health outcomes such as substance use and suicidal behavior. Nevertheless, despite the presence of such protective resources, the suicide rate in Trinidad and Tobago is in the 80th percentile for the world (World Health Organization 2018).

Third, the modelling of religiousness, forgiveness, and health by researchers (Skalski-Bednarz et al. 2024a; Worthington et al. 2001, 2003) suggests that commitment to religious teachings on overcoming self-condemnation can help overcome negative affect like guilt and shame. We hypothesize that religious commitment can reduce self-condemnation (i.e., operationalized as guilt and shame) and that this relationship may occur indirectly through self-forgiveness.

1.3. Self-Forgiveness

Research suggests that higher religious commitment is associated with higher self-forgiveness, which might be a means through which self-condemnation (made up of guilt and shame) is reduced (Reid et al. 2025). The ability to forgive oneself would thus be an added protective factor for reducing self-condemnation. Self-condemnation (shame and guilt) could conceivably be reduced in many ways. One could use cognitive reframing, appealing to God for strength, identification with a loving, compassionate, and grace-filled God as a deity who empowers believers, blame shifting, excusing oneself, and other ways of reducing shame and guilt besides forgiving oneself. But self-forgiveness has been hypothesized as a common way of dealing with one's transgressions against others (Griffin et al. 2018) and one's failure to reach one's expectations (Bem et al. 2021; Griffin et al. 2016).

There is little Caribbean regional and local scholarship examining the nature of self-forgiveness. Despite the paucity of local scholarship, we argue that much of the international scholarship on self-forgiveness is connected to the longstanding tradition of liberation theological praxis found at the intersections of Caribbean history, tradition, culture, and religion (Davis 1990). At its core, self-forgiveness is personal freedom from negative self-evaluative thoughts and shameful and guilty emotions (i.e., self-condemnation). The liberation agenda and reconciliation mission of Caribbean faith-based institutions are grounded in continuous attempts at helping individuals "become aware and conscious of weakness and the need for reconciliation with ourselves, God, and our fellow human beings" as a form of personal salvation (Rodrigues 2001, p. 25).

Self-forgiveness is a positive cognitive and emotional state thought to facilitate personal liberation from self-condemnation (Webb and Boye 2024), especially when it is accompanied by individual actions to address spiritual, social, and psychological harm

(Woodyatt et al. 2017). Self-forgiveness involves releasing negative emotions about oneself while letting go of self-hatred and acknowledging wrongdoing and fostering compassion-, generosity-, and love-based emotions toward oneself (Webb et al. 2017; Woodyatt et al. 2017).

Self-forgiveness is also a “moral repair strategy” (Griffin et al. 2018, p. 716) comprising value-re-orientation and esteem-restoration dimensions. Value-re-orientation self-forgiveness includes behavior that accepts responsibility for wrongdoing, brought on by an individual’s decision to change their behavior. Esteem-restoration self-forgiveness is gradually replacing self-condemning emotions with affirming ones. For the most part, esteem restoration self-forgiveness is an emotive state that prompts an individual’s inclination towards changing the way they feel. When taken together, both underlie the need to understand how changes to an individual’s thinking lead to changed emotions and behaviors after committing wrongdoing.

Griffin et al. (2016, 2018) adapted the theoretical grounds for value-reorientation and esteem-restoration self-forgiveness based on arguments within social-cognitive theory on an individual’s need for moral self-regulation. Based on this theory, the dual interplay of both self-forgiveness mechanisms involves understanding how individuals manage and judge their own thoughts and behaviors. Value-reorientation is theorized to direct individuals toward genuine self-forgiveness and away from pseudo self-forgiveness. Esteem-restoration is assumed to primarily mitigate tendencies toward self-punishment (Griffin et al. 2018). Self-forgiveness is a restorative strategy to counter individual feelings of self-condemnation based on different emotions and behaviors individuals enact to affirm themselves while experiencing guilt and shame as threats to their personal esteem and self-worth. Self-forgiveness is a dual process that may require different combinations of value-reorientation and esteem-restoration for aligning or re-aligning individuals towards positive values and the eventual valuing of oneself (Griffin et al. 2018).

1.4. Religious Commitment, Self-Forgiveness, and Self-Condensation

Higher levels of religiousness/spirituality are thought to be associated with higher levels of self-forgiveness and lower levels of self-condemnation (Webb and Boye 2024). The transactional stress-and-coping theory of self-forgiveness (Toussaint et al. 2017, 2023) has also highlighted the importance of self-forgiveness as a mechanism for overcoming individual feelings of shame and guilt. Despite these theoretical suggestions, studies probing the role of self-forgiveness in the relationship between religious commitment and self-condemning experiences are scarce.

1.5. Present Study

The present study examined associations among religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation. Our first hypothesis was that religious commitment would be associated with lower feelings of self-condemnation (i.e., shame and guilt, separately). Thus, we tested the possible direct associations between religious commitment and self-condemnation as consistent with the modelling proposed by Worthington and colleagues (Lavelock et al. 2015; Worthington et al. 2001, 2003). Our second hypothesis was that associations between religious commitment and shame and guilt would be indirect through each of the value reorientation and esteem restoration dimensions of self-forgiveness (Toussaint et al. 2017).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants ($N = 259$) were aged 18 to 78 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 40$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.15$). The majority were female (76%), of African racial/ethnic identity (65%), and had college (38%) or graduate (29%) education. A wide range of incomes were reported. Sociodemographic data are presented in Table 1. This project received institutional ethics approval from sponsoring institutions in the United States and the Caribbean. Participants were recruited through multiple channels (online, posted fliers, local advertisements) and completed an online informed consent and survey. Each respondent received the equivalent of 5 USD for their voluntary participation in this study. The procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant national and institutional committees on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2013. All procedures involving human subjects were approved by the University of the Southern Caribbean (USC-RE-REC-002-2023-0274).

Table 1. Demographic Information ($N = 259$).

Characteristic	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	57	22
Female	197	76
Non-Binary	1	0.4
Annual Household Income		
Less than \$30,000	67	26
\$30,001 to \$60,000	36	14
\$60,001 to \$90,000	32	12
\$90,001 to \$120,000	27	10
\$120,001 to \$150,000	20	8
\$150,001 to \$180,000	25	10
More than \$180,000	43	17
Racial/Ethnic Identity		
African	168	65
Indian	15	6
Mixed	68	26
White	1	0.4
Self-Reported as Other	4	2
Level of Education		
Less than High School	8	3
High School	46	18
Two-year Diploma or Associate Degree	28	11
Bachelor of Arts	99	38
Postgraduate	75	29

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Self-Condensation

The Brief Shame and Guilt Personal Feelings Questionnaire (Rice et al. 2018) was used to measure feelings of self-condemnation (i.e., shame and guilt). The measure has two subscales measuring shame and guilt that are rated using five response options, 1 (never) to 5 (constantly). The shame subscale includes four items (feeling humiliated, feeling stupid, feeling helpless, and feeling self-disgust). The guilt subscale consists of three items (mild

guilt, intense guilt, and regret). In the present study, internal consistency estimates were $\alpha = 0.82$ and $\omega = 0.84$ for shame, and $\alpha = 0.74$ and $\omega = 0.77$ for guilt.

2.2.2. Religious Commitment

Religious commitment was measured using the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (Worthington et al. 2003). Sample items include: “My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life,” and “I spend time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.” Items are rated using five response options, 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (totally true of me). In the present study, internal consistency estimates were $\alpha = 0.95$ and $\omega = 0.97$.

2.2.3. Self-Forgiveness

The two components of self-forgiveness were measured using the Self-Forgiveness Dual Process Scale (Griffin et al. 2018). A sample of value reorientation subscale items includes: “I will try not to repeat my offense in the future,” and “I acknowledge that I am to blame for my actions.” Examples of esteem restoration subscale items include: “Even though I did something wrong, I feel a sense of self-acceptance,” and “I feel like a valuable person despite my wrongdoing.” Both subscales offer seven response options, 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores for all measures indicate higher levels of each construct. In the present study, internal consistency estimates were acceptable for the value reorientation subscale ($\alpha = 0.85$, $\omega = 0.88$) and the esteem restoration subscale ($\alpha = 0.91$, $\omega = 0.93$).

2.3. Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics included means and standard deviations along with a bivariate correlation matrix. We employed standard path analyses using maximum likelihood estimation to determine the extent to which religious commitment had direct and indirect (through value-reorientation and esteem restoration self-forgiveness) associations with self-condemnation. Sociodemographic variables were controlled in the model. Missing data (3%) were missing completely at random and handled using full information maximum likelihood estimation. Analyses were conducted using SPSS (Version 31) and R (Version 4.5.0). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

In Table 2, we display the descriptive statistics for all variables. Religious commitment was inversely and significantly associated with guilt ($r = -0.15$, $p = 0.018$) and shame ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.001$), and positively associated with esteem restoration self-forgiveness ($r = 0.22$, $p = 0.003$) and value reorientation self-forgiveness ($r = 0.14$, $p = 0.046$). A significant positive association was found between value reorientation and guilt ($r = 0.21$, $p = 0.003$), and a significant inverse association was observed between esteem restoration and shame ($r = -0.23$, $p = 0.002$). Shame and guilt were positively associated ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$), and esteem restoration and value reorientation self-forgiveness were positively associated ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Means and standard deviations ($N = 259$).

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Guilt	5.49	2.16
2. Shame	6.17	3.12
3. Value Reorientation	24.85	8.32
4. Esteem Restoration	23.36	9.39
5. Religious Commitment	33.41	11.34

Figure 1 displays the standardized coefficients representing the direct associations between religious commitment, self-forgiveness (value reorientation and esteem restoration), and self-condemnation (guilt and shame). Religious commitment was inversely associated with shame ($\beta = -0.16, p = 0.011$) and not associated with guilt ($\beta = -0.09, p = 0.181$). Religious commitment was positively associated with value reorientation self-forgiveness ($\beta = 0.22, p = 0.003$) and esteem restoration self-forgiveness ($\beta = 0.24, p = 0.007$). Value reorientation self-forgiveness was positively associated with both shame ($\beta = 0.24, p < 0.001$) and guilt ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001$), and esteem restoration self-forgiveness was inversely associated with shame ($\beta = -0.27, p < 0.001$), but not guilt ($\beta = -0.09, p = 0.291$). In terms of indirect associations, we found that religious commitment was indirectly and inversely associated with shame ($\beta = -0.06, p = 0.040$), but not guilt ($\beta = -0.02, p = 0.303$) through esteem restoration self-forgiveness. Religious commitment was indirectly and positively associated with both shame ($\beta = 0.05, p = 0.044$) and guilt ($\beta = 0.06, p = 0.044$) through value reorientation self-forgiveness.

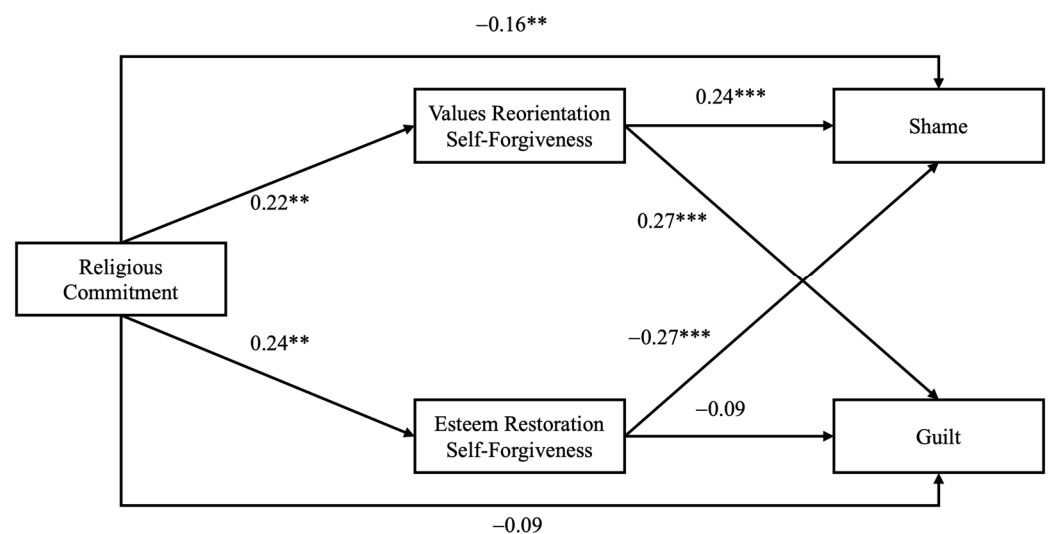


Figure 1. Path model showing standardized coefficients for associations between religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation. Note. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4. Discussion

The present study examined associations between religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation. Overall, the findings provide partial support for both hypotheses. Religious commitment was directly associated with lower levels of shame, but not guilt, whereas its associations with both dimensions of self-condemnation were observed indirectly through self-forgiveness. These indirect effects differed by mechanism, with both value reorientation and esteem restoration linked to shame, and only value reorientation accounting for the association with guilt.

The significant inverse association between religious commitment and shame emphasizes the importance of religious commitment for well-being in the lives of individuals in Trinidad and Tobago. Previous studies in Trinidad and Tobago have also confirmed the importance of religious engagement and commitment, such as attendance at worship services and commitment to members of the faith, as factors that promote good well-being and help to guard against poor health (Toussaint et al. 2015). The beneficial associations of religious commitment with shame were stronger than they were for guilt in bivariate analyses, and when modelled simultaneously in path analyses, only the association between religious commitment and shame was significant. Perhaps religious commitment provides some relief from the development of a shameful character, but the same may not be true for specific wrongdoing for which one should feel guilty. More religiously

committed individuals may more strongly believe that their behavior is imperfect and they should feel guilty about this, but they themselves are not bad people and should not feel all-encompassing shame. Put another way, the most religiously committed may have internalized the belief that humans are fallen (i.e., guilty of wrongful acts, thoughts, behaviors) but redeemed (i.e., not to be shamed and condemned) (Marshall 2020).

Path analyses revealed that religious commitment was associated with shame and guilt (i.e., self-condemnation) in a nuanced fashion, largely as predicted by existing models (Webb and Boye 2024; Worthington et al. 2003). Religious commitment was associated with *more* shame through a positive association with value reorientation self-forgiveness, which was in turn positively associated with shame. Likewise, religious commitment was associated with more guilt through a positive association with value reorientation self-forgiveness, which in turn was positively related to guilt. Religious commitment was associated with *less* shame through a positive association with esteem restoration self-forgiveness, which was in turn negatively associated with shame. Religious commitment was not indirectly associated with guilt through esteem restoration.

Religious commitment appears to be more tightly connected to upholding one's value system, and as such, could lead to shame and guilt as one recognizes that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are contrary to their values. Religious commitment may highlight value discrepancies and perhaps intensify them (Moon and Tobin 2018). Conversely, reconnecting with one's sense of inherent self-worth may ameliorate shame or allow a disconnection from guilt as one engages with and realizes the benefits of self-empathy.

Although it was exclusively indirectly associated with religious commitment through value reorientation self-forgiveness in this study, guilt may sometimes lead to adaptive outcomes (Taihara and Malik 2016). For instance, Nelissen and Zeelenberg (2009) demonstrated that guilt can evoke self-punishment which, although costly, may serve a reparative or functional role. In light of this and Griffin et al.'s (2018) argument that only value reorientation enables genuine self-forgiveness, it is plausible that certain forms of guilt could function as a catalyst for transformation. This possibility is also consistent with therapeutic perspectives emphasizing the importance of facing painful truths early in the healing process as a prerequisite for genuine self-forgiveness (Worthington et al. 2003). Nevertheless, this broader perspective extends beyond the mechanisms explicitly tested in the present study (Cornish et al. 2018; Worthington et al. 2003).

In sum, our results suggest that (1) religious commitment is directly associated with lower levels of shame, but not guilt, and (2) religious commitment is associated with shame and guilt through both dimensions of self-forgiveness (value reorientation and esteem restoration) in unique and opposing ways. These findings largely corroborate Worthington's comprehensive modelling regarding forgiveness as a component of the larger association of religiousness/spirituality with health (Lavelock et al. 2015; Worthington et al. 2001, 2003).

4.1. Implications

Although important strides have been made in improving the socio-economic condition of Trinidad and Tobago's population, large mental health research and treatment gaps persist (Pan-American Health Organization 2018). While the education and health services sectors in Trinidad and Tobago have already institutionalized varying levels of commitment to religious values, and forgiveness as an important practice, these findings can provide additional insights on how service delivery policies and practices in Trinidad and Tobago may be meaningfully supplemented or improved. Our findings show a direct association of religious commitment with a lower tendency to 'beat oneself up' by internalizing shame. This may be an important insight into the lives of patients, interpersonal violence victims,

students, and other groups suffering with shame and guilt, including when such negative emotions are unwarranted.

As one example, promoting growth-oriented perspectives in patients might help them recognize the role of religious commitment and virtues such as self-forgiveness in shifting their focus from falling short to redefining flourishing (Snyder et al. 2016). As another example, within the local education sector, the present findings may highlight the importance of religious and spiritual virtues as a potential support in school counselling. Religious beliefs might support a focus on reframing potentially shame and guilt-producing deficit perspectives on teaching and learning.

Religious commitment, acting both directly and indirectly through self-forgiveness, may help students view their perceived 'failure' as repairable. These are important concepts that could be considered when counselling struggling students. This may be especially true when managing and overcoming the feelings of guilt and shame brought on by internalized self-denouncing feelings and overexposure to the deficit narratives and circumstances, attributing personal defectiveness to academic underachievement (Yeager and Dweck 2012). Yeager and Dweck (2012) and other scholars (Thomas 2019, 2023; Wolcott et al. 2021) have all provided valuable evidence supportive of growth-oriented approaches for overcoming challenges related to finding alternative pathways for actualizing students' or patients' latent potential.

Of note, religious and spiritual, educational, and psychological perspectives each prioritize (1) understanding human nature, (2) facilitating positive character development, and (3) the education of children (Kugelman and Belzen 2009). In this regard, though distinctive differences between these fields of inquiry remain, our findings provide more evidence for collaboration between, if not the purposeful and intentional integration of these fields (Webb et al. 2025). Indeed, the parallels and shared priorities between religiousness and spirituality, education, and psychology are many, varied, and often largely congruent. There is meaningful and "coherent resemblance" (Peterson and Seligman 2004, p. 35).

4.2. Limitations

Our findings suggest that religious commitment has both direct and indirect associations with self-condemnation through self-forgiveness. Nevertheless, there are some limits to our study that should be considered. First, the design is cross-sectional and consequently any causal inferences are theoretical in nature. Future longitudinal studies should examine these research questions with an eye toward determining causal effects, reciprocal causality, and any confounding variables. Second, the participants constitute a convenience sample taken from Trinidad and Tobago. Any generalizations to the broader community or nation must be done with caution. Additionally, although the sample included both male and female participants, women were overrepresented. While this distribution is not uncommon in psychological research (e.g., Pollet et al. 2024; Wilson 2024), it may limit the generalizability of the findings across sexes. Consequently, sex was not included as a covariate in the tested model because the unequal group distribution could have introduced bias into the parameter estimates. Nevertheless, previous research suggests that sex differences in religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-critical emotions are generally small or statistically non-significant (e.g., Cohen et al. 2006; Skalski-Bednarz et al. 2024b). Future studies could benefit from more balanced or stratified sampling approaches to further examine potential sex differences in the observed relationships. Third, although the estimates of internal consistency in our measurement are acceptable, future work might examine cross-cultural psychometrics and further our understanding of religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation to better inform our understanding of these constructs and their relations.

5. Conclusions

The present study sought to explore the empirical interconnections between religiousness, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation in participants residing in Trinidad and Tobago. In examining self-condemnation as a form of emotional distress and poor health, we developed and tested a relevant conceptual model regarding the possible associations between religious commitment, self-forgiveness, and self-condemnation. Our findings suggest that (1) people with higher religious commitment have lower self-condemning feelings of shame, (2) associations between religious commitment and shame were indirect through value reorientation self-forgiveness and esteem restoration self-forgiveness, and (3) associations between religious commitment and guilt were only indirect through value reorientation self-forgiveness.

Importantly, esteem restoration self-forgiveness emerged as the only dimension of self-forgiveness related to lower levels of shame. Conversely, value reorientation in response to accepting responsibility for wrongdoing was actually associated with an individual's higher levels of guilt and shame. Therefore, a person's restorative value system must be considered alongside their attempts to reestablish a sense of self-worth in the aftermath of wrongdoing.

Religious commitment is an important psychosocial factor in health and well-being. Focusing on growth-oriented and anti-deficit strategies following personal wrongdoing, such as self-forgiveness, may go a long way toward helping adults living in Trinidad and Tobago to cope with "beating up" or "taking on" emotional distress prompted by feelings of shame. And, a self-forgiving way of life may be strengthened by (re)visiting and valuing religious teachings in a self-congruent manner.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, A.K.T.; methodology, L.L.T. and A.K.T.; validation, C.M.W.; formal analysis, A.K.T. and J.R.W.; investigation, L.L.T., A.K.T. and S.B.S.-B.; resources, L.L.T., J.R.W. and C.M.W.; data curation, C.M.W.; writing—original draft preparation, L.L.T. and A.K.T.; writing—review and editing, L.L.T., A.K.T., J.R.W., C.M.W., D.R.W., S.D.R., S.B.S.-B., J.S. and E.L.W.J. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This project was made possible through the support of a grant from Templeton World Charity Foundation, Inc. (funder DOI 501100011730) through grant TWCF-2021-20709/TWCF0709 [<https://doi.org/10.54224/20709>]. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Templeton World Charity Foundation, Inc.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of the Southern Caribbean (USC-RE-REC-002-2023-0274; 23 February 2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The dataset underpinning the conclusions of this research is accessible upon request from the corresponding author, L.L.T. These data are not publicly available to protect the confidentiality of research participants and prevent any potential compromise of their privacy.

Acknowledgments: S.S.-B. is a recipient of financial support from the Foundation for Polish Science (FNP).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

- Barrow, Christine. 1996. *Family in the Caribbean: Themes and Perspectives*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Bem, Jemima R., Peter Strelan, and Michael Proeve. 2021. Roads Less Travelled to Self-Forgiveness: Can Psychological Flexibility Overcome Chronic Guilt/Shame to Achieve Genuine Self-Forgiveness? *Journal of Contextual Behavioral Science* 21: 203–11. [[CrossRef](#)]

- Cohen, Adam B., Ariel Malka, Paul Rozin, and Lina Cherfas. 2006. Religion and Unforgivable Offenses. *Journal of Personality* 74: 85–118. [CrossRef]
- Cornish, Marilyn A., Lydia Woodyatt, Graham Morris, Anne Conroy, and Jessica Townsden. 2018. Self-Forgiveness, Self-Exoneration, and Self-Condensation: Individual Differences Associated with Three Patterns of Responding to Interpersonal Offenses. *Personality and Individual Differences* 129: 43–53. [CrossRef]
- Davis, Kortright. 1990. *Emancipation Still Comin. Explorations in Caribbean Emancipatory Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Griffin, Brandon J., Everett L. Worthington, Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook, and Shira Maguen. 2018. Development of the Self-Forgiveness Dual-Process Scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 65: 715–26. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Griffin, Brandon J., Jaclyn M. Moloney, Jeffrey D. Green, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Brianne Cork, June P. Tangney, Daryl R. Van Tongeren, Don E. Davis, and Joshua N. Hook. 2016. Perpetrators' Reactions to Perceived Interpersonal Wrongdoing: The Associations of Guilt and Shame with Forgiving, Punishing, and Excusing Oneself. *Self and Identity* 15: 650–61. [CrossRef]
- Hilton, Patrick. 2002. *The Role of Religion in Caribbean History. From Amerindian Shamanism to Rastafarianism*. New York: Billpops Publications.
- Kim, Sangmoon, Ryan Thibodeau, and Randall S. Jorgensen. 2011. Shame, Guilt, and Depressive Symptoms: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Psychological Bulletin* 137: 68–96. [CrossRef]
- Kugelmann, Robert, and Jacob A. Belzen. 2009. Historical Intersections of Psychology, Religion, and Politics in National Contexts. *History of Psychology* 12: 125–31. [CrossRef]
- Kurtz, Ernest. 2007. *Shame & Guilt*, 2nd ed. Bloomington: iUniverse.
- Lavelock, Caroline R., Daniel J. Snipes, Brandon J. Griffin, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Don E. Davis, Joshua N. Hook, Eric G. Benotsch, and James Ritter. 2015. A Conceptual Model of Forgiveness and Health. In *Forgiveness and Health*. Edited by Loren Toussaint, Everett Worthington and David R. Williams. Dordrecht: Springer. [CrossRef]
- Marshall, Christopher D. 2020. Sin, Shame and Atonement: A Challenge for Secular Redemption. In *Criminology and Public Theology*. Bristol: Policy Press. [CrossRef]
- Moon, Dawne, and Theresa W. Tobin. 2018. Sunsets and Solidarity: Overcoming Sacramental Shame in Conservative Christian Churches to Forge a Queer Vision of Love and Justice. *Hypatia* 33: 451–68. [CrossRef]
- Nelissen, Rob M. A., and Marcel Zeelenberg. 2009. When Guilt Evokes Self-Punishment: Evidence for the Existence of a Dobby Effect. *Emotion* 9: 118–22. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Pan-American Health Organization. 2018. The Burden of Mental Disorders in the Region of the Americas. Available online: https://iris.paho.org/bitstream/handle/10665.2/49578/9789275120286_eng.pdf?sequence=10 (accessed on 10 April 2026).
- Peterson, Christopher, and Martin E. P. Seligman. 2004. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Pollet, Thomas V., Jeanne Bovet, Rosie Buhaenko, Piers L. Cornelissen, and Martin J. Tovée. 2024. Sample Characteristics for Quantitative Analyses in *Body Image*: Issues of Generalisability. *Body Image* 49: 101714. [CrossRef]
- Reid, Sandra D., Shelly-Ann Hunte, Marielle Joseph, and Marsha Ivey. 2025. Exploring the Role of Self-Forgiveness to Explain the Relationship between Religiosity and Wellbeing in Individuals with Serious Mental Illness. *Religions* 16: 955. [CrossRef]
- Reynolds, Conroy Everton, Colwick Wilson, and Brian Distelberg. 2016. Relational Spirituality and Depression among Married Couples in Antigua. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 19: 506–21. [CrossRef]
- Rice, Simon, David Kealy, Matt Treeby, Olivier Ferlatte, John Olliffe, and John Ogrodniczuk. 2018. Male Guilt—And Shame-Proneness: The Personal Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ-2 Brief). *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy* 20: 46–54. [CrossRef]
- Rodrigues, M. 2001. *Violence, Theology and the Caribbean Person. Catholic Theology in the Caribbean Today*. Tamil Nadu: Archdiocesan Pastoral Centre.
- Rollocks, Steve, Natasha Dass, Gerard Hutchinson, and Linda Mohammed. 2013. The Associations Observed between Experiencing Multiple Traumatic Events and Mental Health Symptoms among Adolescents in Trinidad. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 6: 246–59. [CrossRef]
- Skalski-Bednarz, Sebastian Binyamin, Jon R. Webb, Colwick M. Wilson, Loren L. Toussaint, Janusz Surzykiewicz, Sandra D. Reid, David R. Williams, and Everett L. Worthington, Jr. 2024b. Pathways to Flourishing: The Roles of Self- and Divine Forgiveness in Mitigating the Adverse Effects of Stress and Substance Use among Adults in Trinidad and Tobago. *Religions* 15: 1060. [CrossRef]
- Skalski-Bednarz, Sebastian Binyamin, Loren L. Toussaint, Jon R. Webb, Colwick M. Wilson, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., David Williams, Sandra D. Reid, and Janusz Surzykiewicz. 2024a. Religion and Flourishing among Afro-Trinidadians: The Influence of Proneness to Guilt/Shame and Forgiveness by God on the Relationship between Religious Commitment and Health. *Frontiers in Public Health* 12: 1443960. [CrossRef]
- Snyder, Charles Richard, Shane J. Lopez, Lisa M. Edwards, and Susana C. Marques, eds. 2016. *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [CrossRef]
- Taihara, Quratulain, and Jamil A. Malik. 2016. Is It Adaptive or Maladaptive? Elaborating Conditional Role of Shame and Guilt in Development of Psychopathologies. *Psychological Studies* 61: 331–39. [CrossRef]

- Thomas, Amanda K. 2019. An Inductive Meta-Synthesis of Qualitative Educational Research in the English Speaking Caribbean: 1990–2016. In *Decolonizing Qualitative Approaches for and by the Caribbean*, 1st ed. Edited by Saran Stewart. Leeds: Emerald Publishing Limited. [CrossRef]
- Thomas, Amanda K. 2023. The Differences in Summative Academic Achievement between African American and African Caribbean Students: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Education and Development in the Caribbean* 20: 230–58. [CrossRef]
- Toussaint, Loren, Colwick M. Wilson, Leon C. Wilson, and David R. Williams. 2015. Religiousness and Suicide in a Nationally Representative Sample of Trinidad and Tobago Adolescents and Young Adults. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 50: 1441–50. [CrossRef]
- Toussaint, Loren, Everett L. Worthington, Jon R. Webb, Colwick Wilson, and David R. Williams. 2023. Forgiveness in Human Flourishing. In *Human Flourishing*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. [CrossRef]
- Toussaint, Loren L., Jon R. Webb, and Jameson K. Hirsch. 2017. Self-Forgiveness and Health: A Stress-and-Coping Model. In *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. [CrossRef]
- VanderWeele, Tyler J. 2017. Religious Communities and Human Flourishing. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 26: 476–81. [CrossRef]
- VanderWeele, Tyler J., Michael Balboni, and John Peteet. 2017. Religion and Health: A Synthesis. In *Spirituality and Religion within the Culture of Medicine: From Evidence to Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wallace, Wendell C., and Moyia Rowtham. 2025. Vicarious Traumatization of Qualitative Researchers in Higher Education in Trinidad and Tobago. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 21: 63–81. [CrossRef]
- Webb, Jon, and Comfort Boye. 2024. Self-Forgiveness and Self-Condensation in the Context of Addictive Behavior and Suicidal Behavior. *Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation* 15: 21–30. [CrossRef]
- Webb, Jon R., David J. Bumgarner, Elizabeth Conway-Williams, Trever Dangel, and Benjamin B. Hall. 2017. A Consensus Definition of Self-Forgiveness: Implications for Assessment and Treatment. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 4: 216–27. [CrossRef]
- Webb, Jon R., Seyma N. Saritoprak, George E. Comiskey, James M. Nelson, and Doug Oman. 2025. Parallels between Positive Psychology and Spirituality. In *Handbook of Spirituality, Health, and Well-Being*, 1st ed. Edited by Jon R. Webb. Abingdon: Routledge. [CrossRef]
- Wilson, Syla. 2024. Sociodemographic Reporting and Sample Composition over Three Decades of Psychopathology Research: A Systematic Review and Quantitative Synthesis. *Journal of Psychopathology and Clinical Science* 133: 20–36. [CrossRef]
- Winer, Lise. 2009. *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago: On Historical Principles*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Wint, Eleanor. 2001. The Poor in the Caribbean: Some Facts, Figures and Postulates. In *A New Perspective on Poverty in the Caribbean. The Strength of a Participatory Approach*. Edited by Juliet Melville and Eleanor Wint. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Wolcott, Michael D., Jacqueline E. McLaughlin, Alice Hann, Amelia Miklavec, Gary L. Beck Dallaghan, Denise H. Rhoney, and Meg Zomorodi. 2021. A Review to Characterise and Map the Growth Mindset Theory in Health Professions Education. *Medical Education* 55: 430–40. [CrossRef]
- Woodyatt, Lydia, Everett L. Worthington, Michael Wenzel, and Brandon J. Griffin. 2017. Orientation to the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness. In *Handbook of the Psychology of Self-Forgiveness*. Edited by Lydia Woodyatt, Everett L. Worthington, Michael Wenzel and Brandon J. Griffin. Cham: Springer International Publishing. [CrossRef]
- World Health Organization. 2018. World Health Statistics Data Visualizations Dashboard: Suicideat. Available online: <https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.sdg.3-4-viz-2?lang=en> (accessed on 10 April 2026).
- Worthington, Everett L., Jr., Jack W. Berry, and Les Parrott. 2001. Unforgiveness, Forgiveness, Religion, and Health. In *Faith and Health: Psychological Perspectives*. Edited by Thomas G. Plante and Allen C. Sherman. New York: Guilford Press.
- Worthington, Everett L., Jr., Nathaniel G. Wade, Terry L. Hight, Jennifer S. Ripley, Michael E. McCullough, Jack W. Berry, Michelle M. Schmitt, James T. Berry, Kevin H. Bursley, and Lynn O'Connor. 2003. The Religious Commitment Inventory-10: Development, Refinement, and Validation of a Brief Scale for Research and Counseling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 50: 84–96. [CrossRef]
- Yeager, David Scott, and Carol S. Dweck. 2012. Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed. *Educational Psychologist* 47: 302–14. [CrossRef]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.