

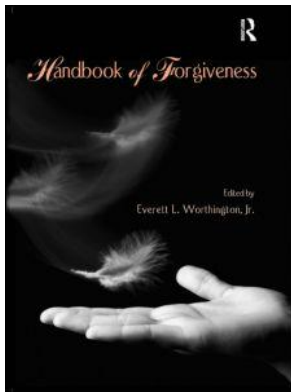
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 11 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



Handbook of Forgiveness

Everett L. Worthington, Jr.

Forgiveness in Cultural Context

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203955673.ch4>

Steven J. Sandage, Ian Williamson

Published online on: 21 Jun 2005

How to cite :- Steven J. Sandage, Ian Williamson. 21 Jun 2005, *Forgiveness in Cultural Context* from: Handbook of Forgiveness Routledge

Accessed on: 11 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203955673.ch4>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Chapter Four

Forgiveness in Cultural Context

Steven J. Sandage
Ian Williamson

Forgiveness is a construct that can be traced and studied in connection with diverse streams of literature from cultures around the globe. As psychologists, we are most familiar with the body of psychological literature on forgiveness that has developed over the past two decades (for reviews, see Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Fincham, 2000; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Numerous psychological definitions, measures, and models of forgiveness are currently available for researchers and practitioners. Forgiveness represents a scholarly landscape that is much stronger in variety than orderly coherence. Wuthnow's (2000) sociological study of a nationally representative sample of adult Americans suggested that respondents' understandings of forgiveness had "fuzzy edges" (p. 126), reflecting considerable diversity about the definitions, boundaries, and moral contingencies of forgiveness. Based on his interviews, Wuthnow concluded:

Forgiveness is a culturally available category that people associate with a loosely defined set of attitudes and behavior that often includes making sense of or giving a new interpretation to a past action, overcoming anger or guilt, gaining a feeling of cleansing or wholeness, and being able to think about or interact with an offending or aggrieved person in a new way. (p. 127)

Despite how culturally available and embedded forgiveness is as a construct, surprisingly little empirical research has focused on investigating cultural and contextual variables in relationship to forgiveness (Lamb, 2002; Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). Is forgiveness valued and practiced in similar ways across cultures? How do particular cultural and contextual factors influence individual and group processes of forgiveness and unforgiveness? These kinds of questions remain largely unaddressed in contemporary social science, but a few studies and theoretical papers do offer starting points for charting next steps for researchers and practitioners interested in forgiveness and culture. Our primary goals in this chapter are to (a) review the limited available social science literature that pertains directly to relationships between forgiveness and culture, (b) suggest some promising directions for future

research on forgiveness and culture, and (c) highlight some cultural implications for applied work in the area of forgiveness. However, attempting to understand the ways in which culture influences processes of forgiveness requires defining both *culture* and *forgiveness*. In the following section, we will outline our present understandings of culture and forgiveness.

PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS AND CULTURE

Defining Culture

The American Psychological Association (APA, 2003) multicultural guidelines define *culture* as “the belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions, including psychological processes (language, caretaking practices, media, educational systems) and organizations” (p. 380). These APA guidelines further describe culture as “the embodiment of a worldview” and say that “all individuals are cultural beings and have a cultural, ethnic, and racial heritage” (p. 380). APA encourages psychologists to be “culture-centered” by using a “cultural lens” and recognizing that “all individuals, including themselves, are influenced by different contexts, including the historical, ecological, sociopolitical, and disciplinary” (p. 380). This inclusive APA definition of culture suggests that every definition, model, or theory of forgiveness is influenced by cultural and contextual dimensions in numerous ways. The recent emergence of cultural psychology as a discipline represents an effort to understand the reciprocal influences and mutual constitution of culture and mind (Cole, 1996; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). In this view, cultural practices and meanings inform psychological processes, which recursively “generate and transform these cultural practices and meanings” (Fiske et al., 1998, p. 916).

Cole (1996) draws on Russian cultural-historical psychologists, such as Vygotsky and various anthropologists, in offering an intriguing definition of culture as a “system of artifacts” (p. 142) that serve to coordinate individuals with their environmental contexts. Artifacts, in Cole’s view, are simultaneously material and ideal (or cognitive) and include culturally shaped tools that mediate human action. The various levels of artifacts include physical objects (e.g., a peace pipe, storycloth weaving, communion chalice), the symbolic tools of words and written materials (e.g., a sacred text, a self-help book, a journal entry), and cognitive scripts or schemas that culturally shape moral and religious values and interpretations of behavior (e.g., only apologize to those with higher power and status, “don’t let the sun go down on your anger,” forgiveness requires giving a gift). Cultural artifacts mediate the action processes through which subjects transform objects in relationship to contexts or ecologies at multiple levels (e.g., dyads, families, clans, communities, etc.). This view of culture challenges researchers and practitioners to consider the complex interactions between these differing dimensions of culture.

Cole's definition and model of culture does not negate the value of experimental and quantitative research on forgiveness, although his view does expose the limitations of viewing culture as simply a categorical independent variable based on demographic sheets. Forgiveness definitions, models, and interventions developed by psychologists and other cultural workers (e.g., spiritual leaders) can be understood as culture-laden tools or practices (i.e., artifacts) used to describe certain ways of coping with interpersonal conflict. In fact, we are intrigued with the sociological thesis that the growing psychological and therapeutic literature on forgiveness in North America may be a response to new historical challenges of coping with interpersonal conflict and resentment in an individualistic societal context with declining social capital. At other points in history, religious and family influences may have offered stronger social networks that helped mediate interpersonal conflict through communal forgiveness-like artifacts (e.g., religious teachings and practices, intergenerational family mediation). As many individuals have become less connected to the social capital and moral authority of tightly knit communities, new psychological construals of forgiveness might be offering cultural tools for those trying to adapt to an individualistic ecology by freeing the self from negative attachments to others. This thesis could be loosely supported by the fact that most of the contemporary psychological literature has focused on forgiving others or on self-forgiveness with comparably less focus on seeking forgiveness or reconciliation (Sandage & Wiens, 2001).

Defining Forgiveness

Among the many psychological definitions of individual forgiveness toward others, we have been most influenced by McCullough's (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002) social psychological model of intrapersonal forgiveness of an offender as a process of pro-social transformation in interpersonal motivations toward that offender where motivations become less vengeful and avoidant, and more benevolent. This definition suggests there are both active (vengeful) and passive (avoidant or exclusionary) motivational alternatives to forgiveness.

Theoretical Assumptions

We will briefly outline some of the contours of our present theoretical assumptions about forgiveness and culture as a way of admitting our expectations and potential biases.

1. Forgiveness emerges at multiple levels of human development as ways relational subsystems attempt to adapt to their *ecological* or *systemic contexts*. These subsystems could be individuals, dyads, families, communities, nations, or other groupings. The subsystem unit of focus in forgiveness research and practice (e.g.,

individual, dyad, community) is itself a culture-laden decision (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). For example, traditional, highly collectivistic Hmong tend to view forgiveness as a communal process of restoring face and harmony between clans rather than an individual decision or dyadic process. Ecological or multisystemic perspectives also suggest forgiveness could be one form of systemic equilibrium or ecological balancing between subsystems (Maddock & Larson, 1995; Trzyna, 1997). These perspectives serve to widen the frame of reference for determining whether a particular form of forgiveness meets optimal standards for social justice and ecological health. For example, forms of forgiveness that threaten the integrity or survival of a particular subsystem could be considered unjust, unhealthy, and potentially ecologically damaging, such as when abuse victims remain in abusive relationships with perpetrators (Lamb, 2002).

2. More specifically, forgiveness represents one way in which subsystems attempt to balance *power* and *control* in their ecosystemic contexts. The dynamics of power and control are largely neglected in the psychological literature on forgiveness (Fincham, 2000; Lamb, 2002; Shults & Sandage, 2003). Maddock and Larson (1995) use dictionary definitions of *power* (“the capacity to influence”) and *control* (“the capacity to restrain or regulate influence”) to develop a single dialectical construct (power/control) reflecting the interactive nature of these constructs in human systems (p. 55). They assert that power and control are both necessary components of social interaction and, if unbalanced, become distorted and oppressive. For example, the distorted dynamics of power/control can be replicated by the very social systems charged to intervene in abusive relationships. Authority figures who use coercion to demand forgiveness from someone may unintentionally perpetuate a cycle of overpowering and victimization. Conversely, healthy forgiveness might be an empowering way of negotiating boundaries. Forgiveness can be described as resulting from the intersubjective and self-differentiating capacity to recognize both self and other as subjects and agents rather than objects for domination or rigid control (Sandage, in press).
3. The cultural worldview contours of *individualism* and *collectivism* represent a promising set of dimensions for understanding cultural differences in models of forgiveness (Sandage et al., 2003; Sandage & Wiens, 2001). In Table 4.1, we provide an outline for contrasting individualistic and collectivistic worldviews as they might influence models of forgiveness. Our contrast is offered as a general heuristic and is based largely on theory rather than empirical data at this point, although we will review some empirical support in this chapter.

Individualistic worldviews tend to construe selfhood as independent and self-reflective, emphasizing personal boundaries and self-definition. Individualistic worldviews are likely to construe forgiveness as a personal choice to fit with exchange or contractual views of relationships. The primary individualistic face-concern would be saving self-face, so forgiveness might be practiced if it heals a loss of self-esteem. Forgiveness and reconciliation would be considered sharply distinct in order to preserve

TABLE 4.1. Comparison of Individualistic and Collectivistic Worldviews in Relation to Forgiveness

Factor viewed	Individualistic worldview	Collectivistic worldview
View of self	Independent, self-reflexive	Interdependent, socially embedded
View of relationships	Exchange/contractual	Communal/covenantal
Primary face concern	Self-face	Other-face and self-face
Forgiveness and reconciliation	Sharply distinct	Closely related
Value of self-forgiveness	High	Low
Central goal of forgiveness	Personal well-being	Social well-being
Primary tools for forgiveness	Professional psychotherapy, self-help resources, and individual coping skills	Communal mediators/healers, narratives, rituals, and symbols

Note: Adapted from Sandage & Wiens (2001), this table is intended to provide a general heuristic for outlining and comparing models of forgiveness based on individualistic and collectivistic worldviews. Admittedly, there are many versions of individualism and collectivism, and some bicultural individuals can even employ both. The hypothesized differences are based mostly on theory rather than empirical data.

individual boundaries. Self-forgiveness fits an individualistic emphasis on self-reflexivity and freedom from communal authority. The goal of individualistic forgiveness would be personal well-being for the one who forgives. It would utilize tools such as professional psychotherapy, self-help resources, and individual coping skills.

Collectivistic cultures construe selfhood as interdependent and socially embedded, emphasizing social connections and group norms. The collectivistic view of relationships as communal or covenantal suggests forgiveness would be less a personal choice and more a proscribed duty in certain culturally defined situations. For a highly collectivistic group, an offense or loss of face may not happen to just one person but to several people. Collectivistic concerns for saving both other- and self-face require community involvements in forgiveness. Therefore, when forgiveness occurs, it is not extended by just one person but by a family, group, or clan. Forgiveness and reconciliation are likely to be closely related or synonymous in collectivistic cultures. Self-forgiveness is likely to be implausible from a collectivistic worldview because the self is socially defined and socially sustained. The collectivistic goal of forgiveness will prioritize restoring social harmony and well-being above personal benefits. Members of collectivistic societies are also likely to utilize third-party mediators (e.g., family or clan leaders) and cultural healers (e.g., priests, clergy, shamans) to negotiate conflict and forgiveness through communal rituals and ceremonies. Collectivistic cultural traditions often include narratives and symbols that can provide shared understandings of the cultural tools for forgiveness.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL LITERATURE

As we suggested earlier, there is not a well-developed coherent body of research on forgiveness and culture. In this section, we will review the loose collection of studies we found most pertinent to understanding connections between forgiveness and culture. There are so few published studies on forgiveness and culture that a relatively comprehensive review is possible, yet drawing broad conclusions is dangerous. For this reason, the reader should be aware that our review is tentative, with a strong possibility that initial trends might be disconfirmed. We will first describe and illustrate the main empirical and theoretical approaches researchers have utilized in studying forgiveness and culture. Then we will review the empirical evidence for both general trends in forgiveness across cultures and culturally unique trends in forgiveness.

Empirical and Theoretical Approaches to Studying Forgiveness and Culture

Social science researchers approaching forgiveness and culture empirically have largely relied on three main approaches. One quantitative strategy involves cross-cultural psychological research *within* a particular cultural domain outside of the United States in an effort to test the validity of a forgiveness model previously developed in the United States. For example, Huang and Enright (2000) tested Enright's developmental model of forgiveness in South Korea. Similarly, Park and Enright (1997) used a Taiwanese sample to determine whether older adolescents (ages 20–23) would be more intrinsically forgiving than their younger counterparts (ages 12–14), who were hypothesized to be more extrinsically motivated. In both cases, the researchers were looking to other cultures to *generalize*, providing evidence of the potential universality of a certain forgiveness process. The main advantage of this approach is that it can show how certain aspects of forgiveness may be universal or similar for people across many or all cultures. The main limitation of this approach is that models and measures from one cultural context might be used in a different cultural context without adequate attention to subtle variants in cultural meaning.

Another quantitative approach that researchers have implemented involves cross-cultural psychological research comparing samples from two or more different cultural, ethnic, or racial groups on forgiveness measures. For example, Kadiangandu, Mullet, and Vinsonneau (2001) compare Congolese and French samples, and Takaku, Weiner, and Ohbuchi (2001) compare Japanese and American samples. It should be noted that this type of cross-cultural research includes not only comparisons between cultures across the national divide but sometimes between cultures within the same nation. Azar and Mullet's (2001) comparison of forgiveness schemas between Christian and Muslim religious samples within Lebanon provide one illustration. A major benefit to this type of approach, in addition to supplying direct evidence for similarities and differences across cultures, is that comparisons can still be made *within*

cultures. For instance, Kadiangandu and his colleagues (2001) not only compare the French and the Congolese but also look for gender differences within each culture.

The third empirical approach includes the general category of qualitative methods that anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists have used to try to understand the cultural and social functions and meanings of forgiveness in particular contexts (e.g., Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002). The chief advantage of many qualitative approaches is that researchers can be placed in close proximity to the cultural communities and lived experiences of those being studied. These approaches can provide access to narratives and other cultural artifacts involved in social processes of forgiveness, demonstrating the meaning and functions that forgiveness serves for people of various cultural traditions.

Kratz's (1991, 1994) ethnographic study is a good example in describing how the Okiek of Kenya use a communal ritual of confession and forgiveness as a culturally proscribed rite of passage for the initiation of adolescent girls into adulthood. Kratz's fieldwork with the Okiek spanned 14 years and involved detailed ethnographic analyses of ritual events. For example, 14-year-old Okiek girls confess all of their "social debts" in the form of personal narratives (or *pesenweek*) during a late-night community ceremony in front of a fire. During their confessions, the girls are questioned by a male announcer who challenges them to admit all hidden sins. As the girls confess, they are publicly harangued and jeered by laughter from adult community members, who then come forward in a line and demonstrate absolution and forgiveness by taking turns anointing the girls' faces with a mixture of fat and saliva. This ceremony is followed by the girls' excision (a form of genital mutilation) and culminates in their status transformation as part of the adult community.

One function of this ritual of confession and forgiveness is to alleviate any lingering anger or resentment toward the girls by adults who might be involved in the excision cutting. Kratz (1991) contrasts this ceremony with Catholic confession in which the ritual of confession and forgiveness is played out repeatedly and privately in confessional over the course of an individuals' adult life rather than as a single developmental rite of passage. In a later volume, Kratz (1994) employs semiotics (the study of signs and cultural symbols) to construct her interpretation of the ritual efficacy of Okiek initiation ceremonies in transforming cultural identities. A strength of this type of ethnographic research is the rich, in-depth descriptive data of a cultural practice that would be impossible (and unethical) to study in a lab setting.

Nqweni's (2002) phenomenological interview study with South African families that were victimized by apartheid-related political violence and publicly shared their stories with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) represents a different kind of qualitative approach (for a related case study, see Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002). The interview data offers a thick narrative description of how these families had suffered and the systemic complications involved in forgiving alleged perpetrators. For example, some participants found the public testimony of alleged perpetrators to be unconvincing, and this particularly hindered forgiveness when the location of personal remains was at issue. In some cases, disunity within victimized families

seemed to be exacerbated by the TRC process. Some participants objected to cases where perpetrator amnesty was granted before reparations were clarified. Despite these and other systemic barriers, some of the participants articulated forgiveness toward perpetrators. Community support was described as a primary healing resource for families. Unfortunately, Nqweni did not report the frequencies or location of these themes within the sample, which compromises the adequacy of the description of the data and limits phenomenological validity.

Empirical Findings Supporting General Trends in Forgiveness Across Cultures

Initial empirical research on forgiveness and culture supports the notion that some dimensions of forgiveness may occur in similar ways across cultures. Azar and colleagues (Azar & Mullet, 2001; Azar, Mullet, & Vinsonneau, 1999) demonstrate, in both of their vignette studies, that a general “forgiveness schema” is shared independent of participants’ religious or cultural community. In the first study (Azar et al., 1999), Christian (Catholic, Maronite, and Orthodox sects) participants from Beirut ($N = 48$) read stories of a harmful act committed against a child in the Lebanese civil war and indicated their levels of forgiveness. The stories were manipulated on four dimensions: whether the transgressor had in-group or out-group membership (Muslim or Christian), the degree of intent, the severity of the offense consequences, and apologies for the offense. The second study (Azar & Mullet, 2001) used an identical procedure but exposed a larger sample ($N = 96$) with a balance of Christians and Muslims (Druze, Shiite, and Sunni sects).

Whether participants were Muslim or Christian, Druze or Maronite, they all stated they would be more forgiving when a hypothetical shooting was not intentional, did not carry long-term consequences, and was followed by a perpetrator’s apology. These studies confirm and extend prior research on intentionality, apology, and offense consequences as strong predictors of forgiveness (Girard & Mullet, 1997; McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). This pair of cultural studies (Azar & Mullet, 2001; Azar et al., 1999) also goes beyond previous work by providing evidence that the in-group/out-group distinction may reduce in importance when making forgiveness determinations. Christians were just as likely to forgive Muslims as to forgive fellow Christians for gun violence in a hypothetical scenario, and the same was true of Muslims forgiving Christians. Nevertheless, an avenue for future research is whether this finding would hold up in real scenarios of in-group versus out-group offenses.

Cognitive moral reasoning about forgiveness is another area of possible cross-cultural generalizability. Enright and his colleagues (Huang & Enright, 2000; Park & Enright, 1997) have found evidence that certain cross-sectional trends in the development of forgiveness occur in Eastern cultures in ways that parallel trends in U.S. culture. In Enright’s initial research on adolescents, an age-graded typology of forgiveness was developed (see Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). It was based loosely on Kohlberg’s stages of moral reasoning. Level 1 and 2 forgivers, who tended to be younger,

desired forgiveness only after some level of revenge or compensation has taken place. Level 3 and 4 forgivers, who tended to be older, were largely responding out of a felt obligation to others or society. Level 5 and 6 forgivers, who tended to be the oldest, forgave intrinsically, out of a genuine sense of compassion and love.

Park and Enright (1997) confirmed part of this model on a Korean sample of adolescents who had experienced a personal injury from a friend in the previous 6 months. The researchers used an understanding–forgiveness interview to assess participants' responses to moral dilemmas regarding forgiveness and level of development of reasoning about forgiveness. Younger Koreans (ages 12–14) showed lower levels of forgiveness understanding than did older Koreans (ages 20–22). Huang and Enright's (2000) study of adults in Taiwan further extended the developmental model by gathering behavioral and physiological data. A screening measure similar to the understanding–forgiveness interview was used to select only Level 4 (Lawful) forgivers and Level 6 (Loving) forgivers. Level 4 forgivers were more prone to cast down their eyes, use masked smiles, and show higher blood pressure during the telling of the offending incident than were Level 6 forgivers. This initial evidence seems to suggest a cross-cultural developmental trend in forgiveness that is motivated initially by egocentrism, then social conformity, and finally an intrinsic expression of love. It is important to note that Huang and Enright's (2000) study used a sample that consists exclusively of adults. Therefore, a substantial amount of variation in people's level of forgiveness remained in later life, even within the same developmental cohort. However, these studies were cross-sectional rather than longitudinal and did not include research strategies that could have provided data about cultural differences in forgiveness.

Empirical Findings Supporting Culturally Unique Trends in Forgiveness

There is some empirical evidence and theoretical work that points toward culturally unique trends in the practice of forgiveness. Scobie, Scobie, and Kakavoulis (2002) conducted a comparative factor analysis of undergraduate student samples in Britain ($n = 315$), Greece ($n = 130$), and Cyprus ($n = 119$) using the Scobie Forgiveness Scale, which attempts to measure seven different linguistic components of forgiveness. The groups did not differ on overall willingness to forgive or be forgiven; however, there were some cross-cultural differences on the components of forgiveness as well as item loadings on those components. For example, the British group endorsed guilt-release language more and relationship-repairing language less in connection with forgiveness than did the Greek or Cypriot groups. The authors offered little interpretation of the cultural differences in their results.

The most common explanatory framework for cultural differences contrasts individualistic, legalistic societies with collectivistic, communal societies (Fiske et al., 1998). Takaku et al. (2001) conducted an experimental study in which Japanese and American participants were placed in a condition where they visualized a time they

were wrongdoers (hypocrisy-inducing condition) or in a condition where they visualized a time they had been victims. Results showed that although both Japanese and Americans forgave more after being exposed to a hypocrisy-inducing manipulation, the psychological process by which the hypocrisy induction works is different across cultures. Whereas Americans were more attuned to the perceived controllability of the offense (i.e., did the offender have a choice), Japanese were more attentive to the stability of an offense (i.e., the recidivism) and their relationship to the offender. Furthermore, Americans framed the offense more in terms of a violation of justice, whereas Japanese were more apt to frame offenses as violations of norms and roles. A less assimilable finding is that while the Japanese tendency to forgive was mediated entirely by negative emotions toward the offender, the American tendency to forgive was directly affected by several variables: (a) negative emotions, (b) positive emotions, (c) perceived controllability of offense, and (d) the hypocrisy induction (Takaku et al., 2001).

Individualism and collectivism also emerged as potential explanatory constructs for differences between the French and Congolese in the tendency to forgive (Kadiangandu et al., 2001). In a questionnaire study, Kadiangandu and his colleagues found that Congolese claimed to be more forgiving, less vengeful, and more responsive to personal and social circumstances that suggest forgiveness. Older adults in the Congolese sample were more sensitive to circumstances when forgiving, whereas within-group age differences were not found in the French sample.

Beyond cultural differences in individualism and collectivism, Congo and France have very different systems of justice (Kadiangandu et al., 2001). The French system of justice, similar to most Western systems, traditionally involves sanction and control by third party authorities (e.g., police, judges, and juries). By contrast, the Congolese system relies more heavily on relational exclusion and subsequent forgiveness and reintegration in a system based more on restorative justice. Furthermore, because the community is more deeply integrated and interdependent, forgiveness, at times, becomes a necessity for sustaining societal functioning.

Collectivistic societies may also differ simply in how offenses are construed and how many people are involved throughout the forgiveness process. Temoshok and Chandra (2000) found that when Indian women contracted AIDS, 80% blamed their family of origin for their woeful circumstances, whereas only 40% blamed their husbands, who actually gave them the disease. In this study, women in a collectivistic society with family-arranged marriages viewed an offense not strictly as a failure of a husband to exercise responsibility for his sexual behavior but as a failure of their families to marry them to the correct person. Forgiveness, therefore, implies more than just forgiving their husbands but also forgiving their families.

In summary, though forgiveness may have some cross-cultural dimensions, it also appears that forgiveness is understood and practiced in ways that are culturally shaped. Preliminary work suggests that victims from collectivistic societies are more inclined to pay attention to the likelihood the offender will reoffend, whereas victims from individualistic societies focus attention on the offenders' control over the initial

offenses. Furthermore, collectivists may be more inclined to relational motivations for forgiveness, whereas individualists are more motivated by justice considerations. One study (Kadiangandu et al., 2001) showed that a more behaviorally interdependent and relational tribal culture was more forgiving than a comparatively individualistic and legalistic culture; however, no other studies have shown differences in people's overall level of forgiveness across cultures.

NEW DIRECTIONS NEEDED IN FORGIVENESS AND CULTURE RESEARCH

Optimal progress in understanding the relationships between forgiveness and culture in various contexts will require multimethod interdisciplinary approaches to research. In recommending multiple methods, we are suggesting there are scientific strengths to both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative research strategies could start with ethnographic fieldwork studies with various cultural groups, using interview and observational methods to gain thick descriptions of forgiveness-related conflicts, rituals, practices, and other cultural artifacts. These research strategies could employ the paradigms of cultural psychology and indigenous psychology, which value local knowledge and bottom-up model building (Kim, Park, & Park, 2000). Qualitative studies could investigate indigenous definitions of forgiveness and the specific rituals or cultural tools used to generate forgiveness. Collaborative action-research approaches should be utilized, particularly with underserved populations, in order to dialog with participant stakeholders about the benefits of a given study for that group.

It could be particularly helpful to have qualitative data related to the community and contextual dimensions of culture that seem to promote or impede experiences of forgiveness. For example, what types of cultural or systemic factors maintain unforgiveness? And what cultural or systemic factors promote in-group and out-group forms of forgiveness? Longitudinal designs with immigrant or refugee populations could examine the potential health benefits of forgiveness in groups experiencing rapid cultural change.

Quantitative research on forgiveness and culture should prioritize measurement development, an area where there has been virtually no cross-cultural validation of forgiveness measures. This means there is almost no solid data on the degree to which forgiveness is valued or understood universally. As measurement limitations are overcome, structural equations modeling could be used to examine cross-cultural between-group differences on individual forgiveness items beyond analyses of overall scale scores or factor structures. Culture-laden developmental and personality variables that have been previously related to forgiveness, such as empathy or shame, should be studied with cross-cultural samples. A host of cultural variables could be tested for mediator or moderator effects on various forgiveness measures, including individualism and collectivism, acculturation conflicts, family coping styles, and

spiritual and religious variables, among others. The interactions between cultural dynamics and understandings of desecration (i.e., assaults on sacred space) could be a particularly important area of study in order to reduce politically and religiously volatile forms of unforgiveness. Culturally accommodative psychoeducational, counseling, parent education, and substance abuse interventions with forgiveness modules also need to be developed and empirically tested.

RELEVANCE FOR CLINICAL AND APPLIED INTERVENTIONS

Surprisingly few published psychological forgiveness interventions include explicit consideration of culturally appropriate target populations or recommended ways of adapting interventions for cultural diversity. As an example of the relevance of these issues, forgiveness interventions that promote forgiving someone else as an individual choice or decision that can be legitimately motivated by personal benefits may represent an individualistic cultural tool but may not fit the worldviews of highly collectivistic groups. Counselors and therapists should be sensitive to cultural influences on definitions and practices of forgiveness and develop the needed skills for intercultural dialog in this area.

It is also important to consider forgiveness and related issues within various cultural and systemic contexts. Most people live within numerous interpenetrating cultural or relational systems, which can be a source of the very conflicts that raise forgiveness issues. For example, intergenerational acculturation differences are a source of conflict in many families and cultural groups. Awareness of cultural dynamics of power and control in various systems can help prevent the use of forgiveness interventions that are ineffective or even harmful.

Cultural diversity also means that differing groups of people will approach and transform cultural tools for forgiveness in differing ways. For example, writing exercises are common in forgiveness studies and interventions. Yet many recent refugee and immigrant populations are comprised of many individuals with limited English writing skills, making English-based forgiveness writing exercises ineffective as a culturally sensitive tool. One Hmong-American therapist in our area described helping many of his Hmong clients cope with anger and practice forgiveness using the nonverbal cultural tools of weaving storycloth and hammering nails (Sandage et al., 2003). Recent refugee or immigrant populations are among those populations that are often less inclined to visit a mental health professional, so psychoeducational groups might be a primary forgiveness intervention for this group.

PERSONAL THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIELD

The growing field of positive psychology is helping advance scientific and applied contributions related to a variety of developmental strengths and virtues, including

forgiveness. We are encouraged that positive psychologists are joining those in other disciplines who have been studying the human strengths that contribute to personal and communal well-being. Peterson and Seligman (2004) have classified what they take to be universal, cross-cultural virtues supported by evolution. Sandage et al. (2003) argued for the development of a multicultural positive psychology that embraces scientific rigor and cross-cultural research but also explores cultural influences in the diverse expressions of virtues such as forgiveness.

Our current research related to forgiveness and culture involves a partnership with several leaders in the Hmong-American community in the twin cities. The Hmong are a Southeastern Asian ethnic group that fought with the U.S. in Laos against the North Vietnamese. Starting in the 1970s, the U.S. eventually helped many Hmong families relocate to the U.S. from refugee camps in Thailand. Sandage et al. (2003) describe some initial fieldwork consultation with Hmong cultural informants about Hmong understandings of forgiveness. A case study of forgiveness described by a Hmong-American therapist is also used to provide descriptive data of cultural meanings of forgiveness. The fieldwork and case study reveal several dimensions of highly collectivistic Hmong culture that shape the dynamics of forgiveness in ways that differ markedly from many of the dominant models in Western psychology. For example, traditional Hmong spirituality is a mix of animism and ancestor worship, which tends to promote a concern for securing forgiveness from ancestral spirits through correct funeral practices and other ritual sacrifices. The etiology of many physical and emotional problems is interpreted by traditional Hmong as resulting from an unforgiving spirit.

Traditional Hmong also practice forgiveness in a highly collectivistic way where conflicts are expected to utilize family and clan mediation. Interpersonal offenses are often viewed as losses of face for an entire family or clan. Forgiveness ceremonies are held between clans and can include very specific rituals, gifts, and even face washing as symbolic gestures of restoring the face that was lost or shamed during conflict. We are currently working with Hmong therapists in conducting semistructured interviews with Hmong-Americans who are willing to describe their experiences of forgiveness. One research participant clearly referred to one cultural artifact or script that informed his attempt to seek forgiveness:

Because I broke the [axe] handle, I was somewhat afraid. Therefore, I went and bought some good-tasting liquor because we knew that person well. . . . I went to the person and in the Hmong way, I asked him for forgiveness. (Sandage, Xiong, & Chang, 2005)

To our knowledge, published psychological approaches to forgiveness and reconciliation in the West have not included the suggestion of giving “good-tasting liquor” or other gifts. But “the Hmong way” and many other cultural “ways” of forgiveness represent fascinating streams that researchers have not previously explored.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines for multicultural education, training, research, practice, and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist*, *58*, 377–402.
- Azar, F., & Mullet, E. (2001). Interpersonal forgiveness among Lebanese: A six-community study. *International Journal of Group Tensions*, *30*, 161–181.
- Azar, F., Mullet, E., & Vinsonneau, G. (1999). The propensity to forgive: Findings from Lebanon. *Journal of Peace Research*, *36*, 169–181.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Enright, R. D., & Fitzgibbons, R. P. (2000). *Helping clients forgive: An empirical guide for resolving anger and restoring hope*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Fincham, F. D. (2000). The kiss of the porcupines: From attributing responsibility to forgiving. *Personal Relationships*, *7*, 1–23.
- Fiske, A. P., Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Nisbett, R. E. (1998). The cultural matrix of social psychology. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 915–981). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Girard, M., & Mullet, E. (1997). Propensity to forgive in adolescents, young adults, older adults, and elderly people. *Journal of Adult Development*, *4*, 209–220.
- Gobodo-Madikizela, P. (2002). Remorse, forgiveness, and rehumanization: Stories from South Africa. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *42*, 7–32.
- Huang, S. T., & Enright, R. D. (2000). Forgiveness and anger-related emotions in Taiwan: Implications for therapy. *Psychotherapy*, *37*, 71–79.
- Kadiangandu, J. K., Mullet, E., & Vinsonneau, G. (2001). Forgiveness: A Congo-France comparison. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *32*, 504–511.
- Kim, U., Park, Y. S., & Park, D. (2000). The challenge of cross-cultural psychology: The role of the indigenous psychologies. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *31*, 63–75.
- Kratz, C. A. (1991). Amusement and absolution: Transforming narratives during confession of social debt. *American Anthropologist*, *93*, 826–851.
- Kratz, C. A. (1994). *Affecting performance: Meaning, movement, and experience in Okiek women's initiation*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Lamb, S. (2002). Introduction: Reasons to be cautious about the use of forgiveness in psychotherapy. In S. Lamb & J. G. Murphy (Eds.), *Before forgiving: Cautionary views of forgiveness in psychotherapy* (pp. 3–14). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maddock, J. W., & Larson, N. R. (1995). *Incestuous families: An ecological approach to understanding and treatment*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- McCullough, M. E., & Witvliet, C. V. O. (2002). The psychology of forgiveness. In C. R. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 446–458). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nqweni, Z. (2002). A phenomenological approach to victimization of families subjected to political violence. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, *12*, 180–195.
- Park, Y. O., & Enright, R. D. (1997). The development of forgiveness in the context of adolescent friendship conflict in Korea. *Journal of Adolescence*, *20*, 393–402.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

- Sandage, S. J. (in press). Intersubjectivity and the many faces of forgiveness: A reply to Wangh. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*.
- Sandage, S. J., Hill, P. C., & Vang, H. C. (2003). Toward a multicultural positive psychology: Indigenous forgiveness and Hmong culture. *Counseling Psychologist, 31*, 564–592.
- Sandage, S. J., & Wiens, T. W. (2001). Contextualizing models of humility and forgiveness: A reply to Gassin. *Journal of Psychology and Theology, 29*, 201–211.
- Sandage, S. J., Xiong, L., & Chang, Z. (2005). *Forgiveness narratives of Hmong clients: A qualitative study*. Unpublished manuscript, Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, MN.
- Scobie, G. E., Scobie, E. D., & Kakavoulis, A. K. (2002). A cross-cultural study of the construct of forgiveness: Britain, Greece, and Cyprus. *Psychology: Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society, 9*, 22–36.
- Shults, F. L., & Sandage, S. J. (2003). *The faces of forgiveness: Searching for wholeness and salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Takaku, S., Weiner, B., & Ohbuchi, K. (2001). A cross-cultural examination of the effects of apology and perspective taking on forgiveness. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 20*, 144–166.
- Temoshok, L. R., & Chandra, P. S. (2000). The meaning of forgiveness in a specific situational and cultural context: Persons living with HIV/AIDS in India. In M. E. McCullough, K. I. Pargament, & C. E. Thoresen (Eds.), *Forgiveness: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 41–64). New York: Guilford Press.
- Trzyna, T. (1997). The social construction of forgiveness. *Christian Scholars Review, 27*, 226–241.
- Wuthnow, R. (2000). How religious groups promote forgiving: A national study. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 39*, 125–139.

