The psychology of forgiveness and its importance in South Africa

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Abstract
The purpose of this qualitative review is to stimulate empirical research on forgiveness within South Africa (and other portions of Africa). The article explores a Western understanding of the psychology of forgiveness, including its definition as distinct from reconciliation, its sequelae, and its predictors. Findings are examined with particular emphasis on differences between research in more Westernised societies (i.e., United States and Western Europe), where most of the forgiveness research has historically occurred, and research in South Africa. A culturally sensitive approach to the study of forgiveness and reconciliation in South Africa was utilised, and the extant research on forgiveness in South Africa was briefly reviewed. The article informs emergent forgiveness researchers about ways to effectively launch Africa-centric studies and outlines future directions in the field to researchers who are already involved in conducting forgiveness research. Thus, a research agenda is suggested for making an impact on the field of forgiveness, on forgiveness in Africa, (particularly) on forgiveness research in South Africa, and on reconciliation and the furthering of peace.

Keywords
Africa, cultural and political, forgiveness, peace, reconciliation, South Africa

Over the years, Africa has been the site of exploitation, colonialism, political oppression, conflict, tribal tensions among indigenous people, and power struggles. While most offences have been long-practised by colonial governing countries and tribal tensions, other offences continue or are perpetrated anew as leaders vie for power and influence. Much like the rest of Africa, South Africa has also had its share of political atrocities and struggles. Transgressions from the apartheid years

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still characterise many political and personal relationships, despite the replacement of apartheid by a culture of public reconciliation espoused by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Some reconciliation occurred, accompanied by justice, forgiveness, and restoration. While not everyone was satisfied with the process or the outcomes (cf. Byrne, 2004; Nqweni, 2002), the TRC has offered hope to many countries beset by conflict, prejudice, a history of violence and oppression, and injustices. As a result, substantial research was done on the TRC. This forms part of the present review, which summarises the research on forgiveness in South Africa and suggests an agenda for further forgiveness studies.

**Overview of forgiveness**

Research on forgiveness has burgeoned in recent years around the globe. Since the 58 empirical studies of forgiveness that McCullough, Exline, and Baumeister (1998) located approximately two decades ago, currently, over 2500 empirical studies on forgiveness can be identified. Accordingly, scholars have arrived at some consensus on the meaning of fundamental terms regarding forgiveness, although local differences in understanding exist.

**Injustice gap**

Forgiveness is a response to injustice (Wade & Worthington, 2003). The size of the *injustice gap* (i.e., the difference between the way one would like the offence resolved and the way it currently stands) is proportional to the difficulty resolving the injustice (Davis et al., 2016; Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003; Worthington, 2006). There are many ways to reduce the injustice gap: seeking revenge, ensuring that justice is done, divine retribution, relinquishing to a Higher Power, condoning, excusing, justifying, forbearing, accepting and moving on with life, or forgiving (Worthington, 2006).

**Forgiveness**

*Forgiving* is a prosocial response to an offence that reduces the motivations to avoid or seek revenge and promotes more benevolent motives towards the offender (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Exline et al. (2003) identified two types of forgiveness, both of which are interpersonal. *Decisional forgiveness* refers to a behavioural intention to forswear revenge and to treat the offender as a person of value. *Emotional forgiveness* is the emotional replacement of unforgiving emotions (e.g., resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, fear) with positive other-oriented emotions (e.g., empathy, sympathy, compassion, love). Decisions to forgive may not immediately (or ever) be accompanied by emotional forgiveness. When one intends not to continue a relationship with an offender, complete emotional forgiveness involves merely eliminating negative emotions. For offenders whom one values or intends to stay in a relationship with, complete emotional forgiveness needs to eliminate negative emotions and continue to add positive emotions until a net positive relational affective tone is reached (Worthington, 2005).

**The interpersonal context of forgiveness**

A strong interpersonal context affects whether people will or will not internally forgive. Following offences, interpersonal interactions with third parties (e.g., communities, societies) can promote or discourage people to move towards reconciliation and perhaps forgive (Exline et al., 2003). Similarly, interactions with an offender could result in an offender taking
responsibility for the offence, expressing regret and sorrow, apologising, or seeking to make amends (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). However, interactions with the offender could also result in an offender denying responsibility, blaming the victim, inflicting additional hurt on the person, being unwilling to stop hurtful behaviours, refusing to ask for forgiveness, and creating additional injustices. The interpersonal context is vital to forgiveness, but the experience of forgiveness is intrapersonal.

What forgiveness is not

Forgiveness is sometimes confused with related concepts, such as saying ‘I forgive you’, which may or may not be entirely congruent with a person’s internal forgiveness experiences. Forgiveness is also sometimes mistaken for reconciliation, which refers to the restoration of relational trust where trust has been violated (Worthington, 2006). One cannot simply grant reconciliation. Reconciliation is something interpersonal and requires mutually trustworthy behaviour. If one person is not willing to act trustworthily, reconciliation cannot occur and to act as if it has occurred can result in being taken advantage of or suffering further offence and harm.

Forgiveness sometimes requires reconciliation

In Africa (and indeed in many collectivistic cultures), people may hold a strong expectation that forgiveness requires restoration of relationships. A decision to forgive, complete emotional forgiveness, and reconciliation may occur simultaneously, although this is uncommon. In collectivistic cultures, relationships may be grudgingly/resentfully restored and much emotional rancour may remain (Watkins et al., 2011). In such instances, decisional forgiveness and reconciliation may have been experienced, but full emotional forgiveness is still wanting.

In all cultures, people talk about forgiveness colloquially (see Kearns & Fincham, 2005). However, regardless of how forgiveness is commonly understood, scientific definitions must be precise in order to identify mechanisms and processes that accompany forgiveness. While we believe that understandings of forgiveness need more consensus across disciplines, worldwide (see Fehr et al., 2010), and specifically within Africa (Worthington et al., 2016), we acknowledge that general understandings can be, are, and are likely to remain locally nuanced. Thus, the present review focuses on forgiveness research specifically conducted in South Africa.

Method

Search strategy and procedure

On 21 December 2015, Worthington et al. (2016) searched PsychINFO using keywords associated with forgiveness (i.e., forgiv*, offence, apology, reconcile*), crossed with Africa. Articles were screened according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) qualitative or quantitative research were reported upon, (b) samples were located within Africa, and (c) published between 2005 and 2015. Following the initial keyword search, PsychINFO was searched for articles that had cited each reference since its publication. We also searched the reference sections of all available articles for additional references that the database searches did not uncover.

This process identified 75 research studies on forgiveness that were conducted in Africa. Of those, 37 were conducted in or written about South Africa. A subsequent, extended search (adding 1998–2005 and January to August 2016) revealed three books, five chapters, three dissertations, and seven more recent articles. Hence, a total of 55 sources formed the data for the present review.
Each is included in the references (marked with * if cited in this article and with ** if the study was included in the database but not cited directly).

**Data analysis**

The author location, methodological type, and sample quantity details (where applicable) were recorded for each source (a summary of these details can be requested directly from the corresponding author). Of the 55 sources, 28 were empirical studies (quantitative = 15, qualitative = 13). The remaining 27 were conceptual or theoretical articles, review articles, chapters, or books. An inductive, thematic analysis approach was used to synthesise the content from the included studies.

**Results**

**Public truth-telling and reconciliation**

The TRC was established to provide opportunities for people to tell their stories, listen to others’ perspectives and experiences of events, and work towards reconciliation and restoration. Much research in South Africa has aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of TRC hearings (Byrne, 2004; Chapman & van der Merwe, 2008; de la Rey & Owens, 1998; Kaminer, 2006). Although positive expectations from the hearings were generally high among victims, offenders, and others (e.g., observers), questions were raised about the net benefits, how widespread benefits were, and the extent of harm experienced by victims. Exploring the roles of witnesses, perpetrators, and bystanders in TRC hearings, Minow (1998) suggested that the TRC facilitated resolution of pain, but criticisms have been advanced (Chapman & Spong, 2003). Some suggested the methodological process employed by the TRC became perpetrator focused by reducing victims’ testimonials to basic quantitative codes (Statman, 2000), whereas others asserted the victims did not receive appropriate compensation for their suffering (Gibson, 2002).

Research has suggested that evaluations of the effectiveness of the TRC differ based on cultural identification. Vora and Vora (2004) surveyed 158 Xhosa, English, and Afrikaans university students regarding their perceptions of the TRC. English and Xhosa participants reported that the TRC was fairly effective in bringing about truth, but Afrikaans students reported that the TRC hearings were relatively ineffective in this regard. The Xhosa students reported substantial effectiveness in the TRC’s ability to promote reconciliation and overall success, but these perceptions were not mirrored among Afrikaans and English students (see also Thomas, 2011).

**Forgiving violations of people’s human rights**

Controversy exists regarding the degree to which participation in the TRC was beneficial for victims who testified. For many, the process of testifying was accompanied with negative consequences or outcomes. Thomson (2007) used open-ended interviews with victims (n = 12) to examine the effects of giving testimony at KwaZulu-Natal TRC hearings, a year after they occurred. Respondents reported that healing was optimised when perpetrators (a) took responsibility for their abuses, (b) did not justify their crimes, (c) apologised, and (d) requested forgiveness. However, when transgressors failed to apologise as much as victims expected, victims became dissatisfied with the process (Thomson, 2007) and remained in psychological pain. In other qualitative studies, Byrne (2004) found participants to be physically stressed and dissatisfied with the TRC, and Nqweni (2002) found that families were negatively affected by political violence. Notably, the families reported distrusting communities, the state, and the judicial system and felt alienated from political organisations.
In contrast, Gobodo-Madikizela (2011) argued that women promoted the effectiveness of the hearings through their healing, restoration, and frequent pleas for forgiveness (note, though, that healing following testimony has been contested; see McCool, Du Toit, Petty, & McCauley, 2006). For some, financial reparations were considered to be essential to successful healing. Victims at times expressed disappointment with reparations (Skinner, 2000). However, for many, three common types of healing were described, namely, (a) telling one’s story, (b) receiving financial reparations and attempting to meet victims’ desired outcomes (e.g., locating the burial sites of family members), and (c) organising psychological, social, or spiritual support (de la Rey & Owens, 1998; Skinner, 2000; Thomas, 2011; Thomson, 2007). Over half of the studies reviewed involved aspects of recovery in post-apartheid South Africa personally or societally. Years after the hearings had passed, van der Merwe, Venter, and Temane (2009) found that people who told their stories developed a positive attitude, a sense of acceptance of the past, a desire to move forward, an awareness of their own strengths, a willingness to forgive, deeper relationships with family and friends, and less racial prejudice towards Whites (see also Vermeulen, Venter, Temane, & van der Merwe, 2009).

Stein et al. (2008) explored TRC perceptions among 4351 South African adults with different levels of exposure to or involvement in the TRC (i.e., media coverage exposure, physically attended, provided information, or participated in their hearings). Many had positive experiences with the TRC, but victims with higher psychological distress had negative TRC experiences, negative views of their testimonies, more anger, less education, and greater attendance at the hearings. Allan, Allan, Kaminer, and Stein (2006) sampled 134 Black victims of human rights violations who had (a) given testimony in a public TRC hearing, (b) provided a closed statement to the TRC, or (c) had no contact with the TRC. Although most victims were unforgiving towards their transgressors, they reported having made attempts to start forgiving their transgressors. More forgiveness occurred by men and by those who received an apology. Nearly 60% of participants believed their victimisers were earnestly sorry for their abuses.

The findings from some studies suggest that participating in the TRC process was neither beneficial nor harmful. Some findings were essentially neutral regarding the effects of testifying. In Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, and Zungu-Dirwayi’s (2001) study, 134 adult participants (both direct victims or family members of victims) reported no positive effects of testifying as part of the TRC per se. However, when people forgave their perpetrators, they reported having fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Additionally, those who publicly forgave actually had less self-reported forgiveness. This supports distinctions between saying ‘I forgive you’ and the internal experience of forgiving (e.g., Worthington, 2006). Kagee (2006) examined the effects of 148 victims’ testimonies and found no correlation between psychological problems and participation in the TRC. Kaminer (2006) found that most participants felt they were not pressured to forgive.

In general, these studies can be summarised by noting that although positive outcomes were anticipated from the TRC and other forms of testimony (e.g., storytelling), qualitative studies uncovered some negativity and the overall results were mixed. Some benefits were not immediate, with many participants experiencing delayed forgiveness or mental health improvements. When forgiveness was reached, participants tended to report greater positive perceptions of transgressors and the TRC, as well as demonstrate superior mental health.

**Perceptions of perpetrators in the TRC process**

Given that forgiveness occurs in the interpersonal context, reaching forgiveness partly depends on the way victims perceive offenders. Therefore, empathically understanding perpetrators can promote forgiveness. Locher, Barenblatt, Fourie, Stein, and Gobodo-Madikizela (2014) sampled 49 people between 20 and 60 years of age who had either experienced some degree of childhood...
maltreatment – control (n = 18), moderate maltreatment (n = 21), and severe maltreatment (n = 10) – to determine whether childhood maltreatment might cause impaired empathy in adulthood. Participants viewed film clips of people testifying at the TRC. Respondents who reported moderate and severe maltreatment were less empathic, supporting the notion that childhood maltreatment is associated with impaired empathy.

According to the perspective of the TRC, human rights’ offenders whose crimes were politically motivated or coerced were less culpable than were perpetrators who acted for personal reasons. Gibson and Gouws (1999) surveyed 3031 racially and ethnically representative South Africans to determine whether their perceptions matched that of the TRC’s focus on political versus personal offences. The strongest blame was placed on perpetrators driven by hatred or those who used coercive authority to compel others to perpetrate harm. Perpetrators who acted at the command of more powerful individuals were perceived to be the least culpable. According to Gobodo-Madikizela (2002), perpetrators can be humanised by genuine remorse, which, in turn, catalyses victim and observer forgiveness. Amnesty recipients often felt forgiven, accepted, redeemed, and able to exercise self-forgiveness (Ramsey, 2003).

Overall, the research suggests that perpetrators favoured and felt relief in response to government-approved amnesty, which helped offenders accept their wrongdoings and deal with remorse and self-condemnation. Some consider offender transformation to have occurred through Ubuntu, an indigenous African concept referring to the interconnectedness or ‘we-ness’ of humanity (van Dyk, 2008), although negative attitudes towards amnesty found among the population (Gibson, 2002) suggest this may not necessarily be the case.

Predictors of reconciliation

Kraft (2014) explored reconciliation between 34 human rights offenders and 37 victims who testified during South African TRC hearings. Successful reconciliation was dependent on perpetrators meeting four criteria: (a) fully confessing their crimes, (b) conveying genuine, discernible regret, (c) taking ownership of their crimes without excuses, and (d) acknowledging the horrors they inflicted on victims. Reconciliation was considered successful if victims (a) accepted that they considered the magnitude of crimes committed to be more serious than offenders, (b) accepted that there might be ‘multiple truths’ about the reality of the situation, and (c) understood that perpetrators often felt powerless and had no choice but to perpetrate violence.

In another study, Kraft (2015) examined TRC testimonies from 61 violent political crime perpetrators who were subsequently granted amnesty. He identified a stepwise progression of violence in which perpetrators’ initial motivation was influenced by ideology and perceived morality, which then resulted in rational justification to maintain violence. When apartheid ended and the TRC was formed, many perpetrators involved in apartheid atrocities ceased their violence, often changing their ideologies and self-concepts (Kraft, 2015).

Nation-rebuilding after apartheid

Several researchers have theorised about factors that promote nation-building (Kurgan, 2001; Stein, van Honk, & Ellis, 2013; Urbaitis, 2007). Veale and Hamber (2010) suggested that nation-rebuilding involves (a) acknowledging the reality and the lingering effects of trauma related to abuse and (b) helping victims to engage in processes that catalyse restoration. Much of the tension in South Africa has revolved around race relations, compounded by differences in history, injustice, culture, and social standing. Without changes in race relations, the progress of building a nation will be hampered. Smith, Stones, and Naidoo (2003) sampled 429 English-speaking White,
Coloured, and Xhosa-speaking Black South African college students. Whites reported the lowest levels of interracial tolerance. Resentment was greatest among Black participants, followed by Coloured, and then White participants.

In another study, Tihanyi and du Toit (2005) investigated 247 South African adolescents’ experiences in racially integrated Cape Town schools. The adolescents were clustered into one of four school categories according to the type of interracial contact associated with their schools: (a) internal segregation (i.e., a distinct divide between the race groups exists and little effort expended towards promoting integration), (b) colour-blind multiculturalism (i.e., diversity and multiculturalism encouraged, but subtle forms of segregation appear), (c) denial (i.e., students isolated from true integration and reconciliation by institutional choice), and (d) involuntary exclusion (i.e., integration yet to be attained due to past discrimination and continuing resource limitations). Schools categorised as internally segregated had high levels of racial tension and sometimes violence. Even though colour-blind multiculturalism schools held diversity and multicultural values in esteem, informally, students stayed in same race groups and racial issues were rarely addressed.

Part of nation-building involves national pride and respect for national symbols. Bornman (2006) studied ethnic groups from all provinces in South Africa (n = 2128). While differences were found across Afrikaans-speaking Whites, Blacks, Indian/Asian, and Shangaan/Tsonga participants, irrespective of group differences, most participants demonstrated a high degree of South African pride and assigned significance to national symbols. Gibson and Claassen (2010) assessed changes among 4108 Black, White, Coloured, and Indian participants over 3 years (in both interracial interactions and attitudes about race in South Africa) more than a decade after apartheid had ended. Contact and interracial friendships with other races increased, but the significance of the impact of increased contact varied among the groups. Generally, these studies (Bornman, 2006; Gibson & Claassen, 2010; Smith et al., 2003; Tihanyi & du Toit, 2005) suggest that racial relations seem to be improving, and South Africa seems to be coalescing as a more unified nation. Yet, progress is mercurial and the process is fragile, with racial tension often developing from isolated political and social remarks or actions that are construed as representative of an entire group’s perspective (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2016). Therefore, there is a long way to go before a cohesive, undivided, South African society is reached.

Discussion

Authors, methods, and topics

Most articles were authored exclusively or principally by scholars living outside of Africa (supplemented by local African co-authors). For a more representative approach to forgiveness research, more local African researchers should take the lead on research studies, which could bring an African lens to bear on the study of forgiveness in South Africa. The research in this review was a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods (approximately 50%–50% split between the two types). Typically, as research fields mature and establishing causality through experimentation becomes more important, the research tilts from qualitative and descriptive methods towards quantitative (and even experimental) research (Myers, 2013), which has not yet occurred. In research on forgiveness from Western countries, forgiveness has been studied in couple and family relationships, legal disputes (e.g., lawsuits, criminal offences), organisations (e.g., lack of fairness in supervision, conflict between co-workers), and in-group/out-group relations. These are underrepresented in South African research, in which most forgiveness studies have investigated the TRC or societal relations. Many of the quantitative studies included in this review measured forgiveness
as an internalised experience using psychometrically sound assessment instruments, yet, the setting of the TRC and people’s responses to it have been distinctly communal and collectivistic.

**Individualism blended within collectivism**

Prior reviews of forgiveness research have centred on Africa (i.e., Reif et al., 2013; Worthington et al., 2016), but none have focused specifically on South Africa. Isolating the research to date on forgiveness within South Africa, the findings fit with social psychological accounts of forgiveness (Fehr et al., 2010; Riek & Mania, 2012) and apology (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010) in personal relationships. However, one area in particular is cause for further investigation, and cautions against the wholesale transfer of Western understandings of forgiveness and reconciliation to African contexts, is the collectivistic frame or worldview (Hook, Worthington, Utsey, Davis, & Burnette, 2012).

In general, South African research literature has afforded more attention to reconciliation and reconciliation-related behaviour than to emotional forgiveness or decisional forgiveness (Exline et al., 2003). This focus likely derives from the collectivistic–individualistic mix of South African researchers. It is important to show how internal experiences of forgiveness (and related experiences like depression and anxiety) are related to contextual variables. There has been virtually no research concerning physical health sequelae or spiritual outcomes of forgiving or not forgiving.

**Ubuntu, South African style**

Although investigators referenced a spirit of Ubuntu as an explanation for findings, unity of action was largely confined to the behavioural realm as opposed to a shared internalised experience of Ubuntu. Several studies indicated that individual emotional and cognitive experiences might have departed from what would be expected if Ubuntu was a completely collectivistic experience (e.g., Skinner, 2000). Therefore, Ubuntu, in this context, was not an uncritical acceptance of status quo simply because that is what the majority of people were experiencing; there was often dissent and criticism, rather than unity. On one hand, this might be attributed to the diverse South African population. Yet, dissatisfaction was often expressed even within samples of Black South Africans and not just across samples drawn from European and Indian descent (e.g., Byrne, 2004).

**Justice and relational processes**

Despite the emphasis on reconciliation and trust, fairness and justice have received little attention in the research to date. For example, large-scale surveys indicated that many people felt that the TRC policy of amnesty was unfair (Gibson, 2002), but scant research went beyond documenting feelings of vague unfairness to identify what might have made the process fairer.

The pursuit of reconciliation was not the pursuit of reconciliation at any price. Truth and justice were also valued. One might legitimately speculate about the roots of the emphasis on justice. Generally, Western countries emphasise social systems of impartial formal justice. At a deeper level, however, a drive for justice is thought to have evolved from our history of communal living (McCullough, 2008). However, McCullough (2008) has also argued that reconciliation has equally deep evolutionary roots. The spirit of Ubuntu in Africa elevates reconciliation in collective consciousness. Thus, as the European and African cultures interact as they have in South Africa, different pushes for justice and reconciliation emerge from differing cultures. In South Africa, justice and relational issues have both received societal attention.

Although studies explored the interpersonal context in which forgiveness of perpetrators occurred, as mediated by the TRC (e.g., amnesty hearings) or by various groups, little research has assessed internalised processes of perpetrators (Schönbach, 1990), apologising (Fehr &
Gelfand, 2010), seeking and receiving forgiveness (Sandage, Worthington, Hight, & Berry, 2000), dealing with denied forgiveness (Jennings et al., 2016), or experiencing self-condemnation (Griffin et al., 2015).

Third-party forgiveness and social healing

In Western research, third-party forgiveness, in which someone not directly transgressed against takes offence because someone he or she knew was offended, has been underexplored (Green, Burnette, & Davis, 2008). This has been one unique contribution of many South African studies. They devoted attention to third-party forgiveness among family members of victims or among audiences who observed the public TRC hearings. This attention to the interconnected social networks in looking across society regarding political forgiveness has been a major contribution of research in South Africa to the worldwide body of forgiveness research.

In dealing with both truth and reconciliation, researchers in South Africa have dealt well with issues of the societal involvement in unforgiveness and in forgiving and reconciling. But to avoid complicity with violence, people must respect authority. At the same time, they must also be able to confront abuses of authority. In South African research, these processes—the balancing of respecting and confronting abuses in authority—have largely been neglected (cf. Mynhardt, 2013). One approach to societal healing is represented by Staub’s (2013) four principles to preventing group violence, mass killing, and genocide, as well as promoting healing and reconciliation after violence. First, groups must develop positive orientations towards previously devalued groups (see Mynhardt, 2013 for an example in South Africa). Second, victims who might seek revenge should be helped to altruistically prevent future violence. Third, society must reconstruct a shared narrative that includes respect for all groups. Fourth, preventing violence must involve promoting moderate respect for authorities.

Future research directions

Many important issues about forgiveness have not been studied in South Africa. Thus, a research agenda should, at a minimum, include several important areas. First, psychometrically sound scales specific to African languages need to be developed to allow for a better understanding of South African forgiveness. Second, in spite of the collectivism that exists in South Africa, forgiveness and interpersonal dynamics between dyadic, family, group, or organisational members have not been studied. Third, forgiveness’ links to physical health outcomes, physical processes, and social variables have not been investigated. Fourth, studies of forgiveness within indigenous religions are needed. Fifth, group differences in forgiveness processes should be identified. Thus, comparisons are needed between collectivistic and individualistic worldviews, city and rural areas, between religions, and among ethnic groups.

The TRC is a societal restorative justice form of intervention. As such, it emphasises justice through cooperation. Despite the overt emphasis on justice, forgiveness has indirect relevance in such interventions. Even though forgiveness within and around the TRC has been well explored, there is a need to study traditional and smaller-scale interventions aimed at promoting forgiveness. Specifically, randomised controlled trials among interventions (i.e., psychoeducational, psychotherapeutic, couples therapy, family therapy, group therapy, and do-it-yourself workbooks) are needed; none have been conducted in South Africa (cf. for a meta-analysis in Western contexts, see Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). At present, it is impossible to tell whether using or adapting evidence-based interventions would demonstrate similar effectiveness when applied to the South African context. Based on the efficaciousness of interventions like REACH Forgiveness (Worthington, 2006) and the process model (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015) with collectivistic people (Lin et al., 2014), it is plausible that such interventions would produce similar results in South
Africa. Interventions have often been tailored to consider religious (for a review, see Worthington & Sandage, 2015) or cultural factors (Lin et al., 2014).

Also, in Western contexts, there is a strong dose–response relationship between time of the intervention and outcome (Wade et al., 2014), and whether similar findings would be exhibited among South Africans is an avenue for scholars to pursue. Given the collectivistic nature of African cultures, it is assumed that interventions in this region could benefit from a strong community component. Thus, an important question is whether intervention groups conducted in communities in which people know each other might be more effective than intervention groups among strangers.

**Conclusion**

Forgiveness research in South Africa is at an important developmental stage. Despite the importance of the naturally occurring social experiment of the TRC, the TRC has now been well documented, and country- and group-specific research focused on basic social and personality areas is needed to diversify South African research on forgiveness. Opportunities exist to establish a psychology of forgiveness that is consonant with Western research, yet, is unique to the rich South African culture, customs, and traditions that inform reconciliation, forgiveness, and restoration.

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